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They get ZERO security fixes

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From the Editor

It occurred to me recently that I spend as much time staring at a Windows desktop as I do sitting on my sofa staring at my TV. A couple of thoughts sprung from that observation. One, I really should get out more. And two, it's no surprise that I've become obsessed with tweaking every aspect of Windows. If it's going to occupy half my waking life, I need to make sure everything is just as it should be.

Thankfully, Microsoft has always provided lots of options to customise its operating system. It's the same in Windows 10, as we explain in our Cover Feature. We show you how to move and resize tiles, change the appearance of the Start menu, create multiple desktops and much more.

On another note, I'd like to thank everyone who has bought our 2015 Back Issue CD. It's become our fastest-selling CD ever, thanks no doubt to all the Windows 10 content. You can buy it on Amazon at www.snipca.com/19124.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

83%
Market share of Windows XP in 2007 – *p60*

360TB
Size of a new, 'immortal' storage device – *p9*

£70
Price of our favourite new printer: the Canon Pixma MG5750 – *p27*

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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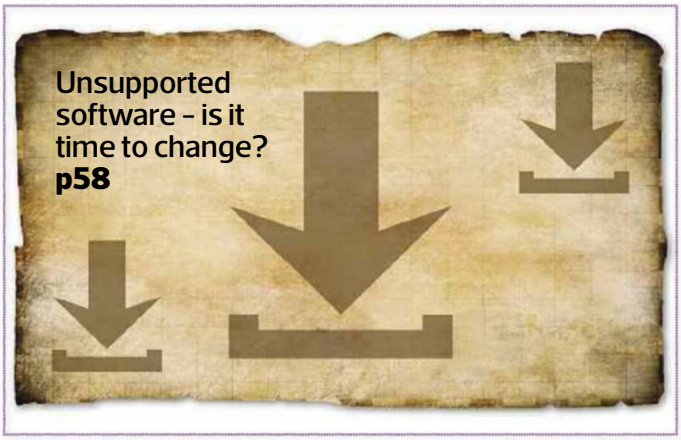

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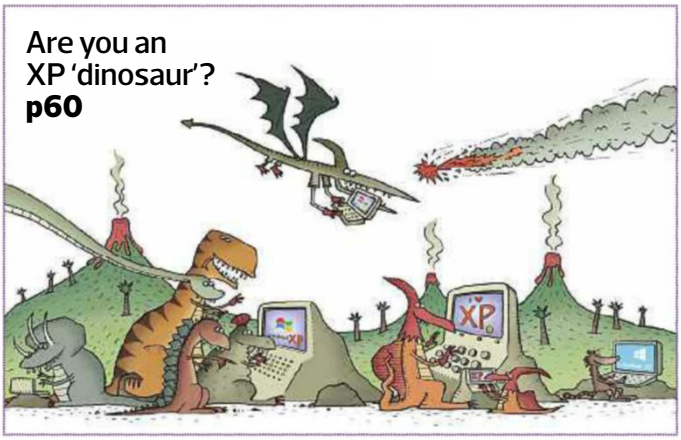

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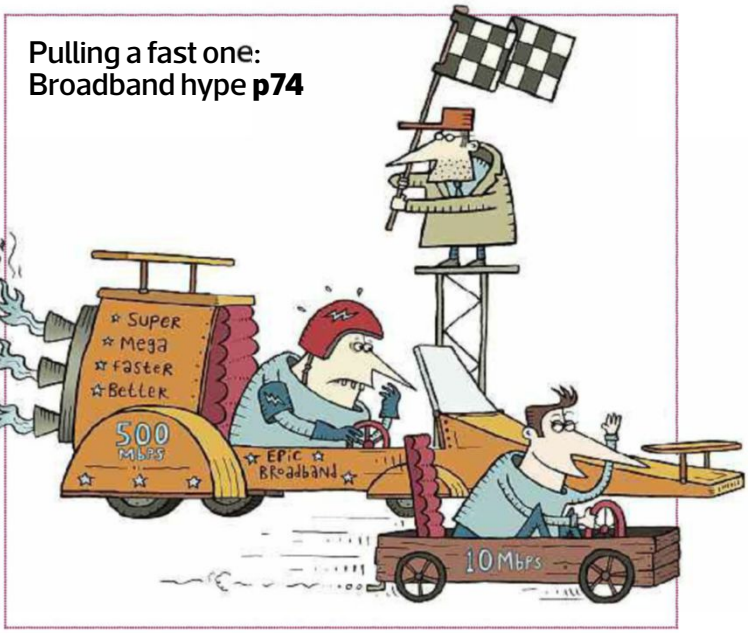

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News

The top stories in the world of technology

Microsoft reveals what's in Windows 10 updates

In a surprising U-turn Microsoft has said it will now reveal what's in Windows 10 updates.

Such information will help users work out if something in the update is causing problems with their PC.

Soon after Windows 10 launched last July Microsoft said that it wouldn't always provide details of an update, choosing to do so only depending on its "significance".

Microsoft's early updates for Windows 10 were criticised for giving vague explanations. For one update last August Microsoft simply stated that it "includes improvements to enhance the functionality of Windows 10".

This had led to confusion and anger among many *Computeractive* readers, who have had no way of knowing whether an update was messing up their PC.

In October Microsoft announced plans to reveal more information about updates, though many independent Windows experts were sceptical that it would amount to much.

But that all changed on 9 February, when Microsoft issued security fixes for Windows and Office in its monthly 'Patch Tuesday' release. Accompanying the fixes was a new Microsoft website with the heading 'Windows 10 update history' (www.snipca.com/19707, see screenshot above).

On the site Microsoft acknowledged that it had been created in response to feedback from users, and will provide "a summary of important product developments included in each update, with links to more details". It will be "regularly refreshed as new updates are released" in order to serve as a "historical record" of Windows 10's development.

The first two updates listed on the website – KB3135173 and KB3135174 – contained "quality improvements and security fixes", but no new operating system features.

The most serious security update fixed a vulnerability in the browsers Internet Explorer 11 and Edge that could have allowed malware on a website to infect a PC.

COMMENT

So, Microsoft does listen to its users after all. It had appeared indifferent to concerns about updates. "We know best", Microsoft seemed to be saying, "so don't worry your pretty little heads about it". Users were expected to swallow the medicine without asking what it contained. Instead, they took Microsoft's haughty attitude as a sign that all kinds of junk was being smuggled on to their PC. Hopefully the new updates website will trigger a fresh era of transparency and trust.

WINDOWS UPDATE CHANGES YOUR SETTINGS - AGAIN!

The good news of Microsoft revealing more information about Windows 10 changes was soon followed by the bad news of the latest updates switching users' default settings.

Thousands of users complained that update KB3135173 switched their default programs to Microsoft's own apps. For example, third-party software to edit PDFs and photos, and watch videos, has been replaced by Microsoft's built-in tools. The update also appears to be changing default browsers from Chrome and Firefox to Edge.

Several complaints were posted on Microsoft's TechNet forum (www.snipca.com/19718). Frustrated users reported programs such as IrfanView and Adobe Photoshop Elements being replaced by Microsoft's alternatives, while compressing files using WinZip had the side-effect of switching the default browser to Edge.

Microsoft hasn't commented on the problems, which echo those caused by the 'November' update last year (see 'Question of the Fortnight', Issue 464). The company later replaced that update after admitting that it inadvertently changed privacy settings.

☺ ***You'll like this...*** ISIS is struggling to recruit members following a Twitter crackdown (www.snipca.com/19717)

☹ ***... but not this*** A website overcharges disabled drivers for the blue parking badge (www.snipca.com/19720)

No more nuisance calls (hopefully) – BT to launch call-blocking service

BT has announced a "breakthrough" that it says will help customers avoid nuisance phone calls on their landlines.

By the end of 2016, the company plans to launch a free service that diverts cold calls to voicemail. It will use "huge computing power" to find and blacklist "rogue numbers". BT claims this "proactive intervention" will block around 25 million unwanted calls every week.

BT will then share any information it gathers with regulators, such as Ofcom and the Information Commissioner's Office, to help them take legal action against nuisance callers.

As part of the service customers will be able to add phone numbers to a blacklist for free, and block certain categories of calls, such as withheld numbers and international calls.

Once a call has been moved to voicemail, customers can listen to it to decide if they need to take further action.

John Petter, chief executive of BT Consumer, called on other companies to "up their game" in the fight against nuisance calls.

He said: "They can help us to root out the malicious players they may be hosting on their own networks when we identify dodgy and suspicious calling behaviour".

BT isn't the first company to offer call-blocking. TalkTalk launched a similar service (also free) in 2013. The company says it blocks around 70 million calls every month. Sky and Virgin Media offer similar services, but you have to pay extra to take advantage of them.

Telecoms experts welcomed the news, but warned that it would be hard for BT to determine what constitutes a nuisance call.

To benefit, you'll need to opt into the scheme - register at www.bt.com/nuisancecalls.

Do you think BT's new service will work? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

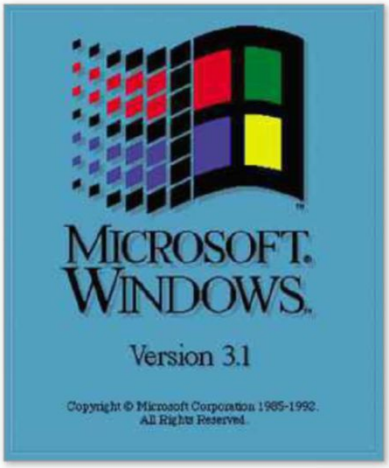
Who needs Windows 10? Run Windows 3.1 online instead

You can now bring Windows 3.1 back to life by running hundreds of its games and programs in your browser.

They are available in a new online collection from the Internet Archive (www.snipca.com/19668), which aims to preserve digital artefacts from the entire era of computing.

It's a wonderful reminder of what computers were like back in the mid-Nineties, when 16bit graphics produced blocky animations and the internet had yet to become so ubiquitous.

In the collection you can play many popular games from 3.1, including Solitaire, Minesweeper, Monopoly and Connect 4. There are also lots of business and 'productivity' programs, as well as basic PC functions such as a calculator, clock and diary.



Launched in April 1992, Windows 3.1 was the first version of the operating system to be released on a CD-ROM. Microsoft ended support for 3.1 in 2001, but remarkably a French airport was still using it last year for air-traffic control (read more at www.snipca.com/19670).

Visit the Internet Archive's blog for more details on the new collection: www.snipca.com/19667. The website has become a much-loved vault for bygone games, software, music and videos. Earlier this year it even added old malware (see News, page 10, Issue 469).

See our next issue – out Weds 16 March – for some great ideas on how to use this incredible collection.

IN BRIEF

ANDROID TEXT VIRUS KILLS YOUR PHONE

A deadly new phone virus is wiping data from Android phones via a single text. The Mazar malware was spotted by Danish security company Heimdal, which said it had infected 100,000 phones in the country. It spreads by sending what looks like a harmless multimedia message to your phone. Clicking it downloads the malware. Heimdal isn't sure whether Mazar has spread beyond Denmark, but UK security experts expect it to target users worldwide.

WHAT DOG ARE YOU? ASK MICROSOFT...

Microsoft has launched a site that answers the age-old question: which breed of dog do you most look like? Just upload a photo at www.what-dog.net to get your answer, along with a description of the breed's characteristics. It's Microsoft's latest attempt to demonstrate the company's facial-recognition photo technology, joining the sites https://how-old.net and www.twinsornot.net.

Tomorrow's world

Scientists at Southampton University believe they've created a storage device that will last forever. Made out of 'nanostructured' glass, the small disc contains a colossal 360TB of data, enough to preserve the history of mankind. Crucially, it has "an unlimited lifetime at room temperature", tempting its inventors to boast that it could last for billions of years. Read more at www.snipca.com/19680.

IN BRIEF

FACEBOOK ADDS SUICIDE PREVENTION TOOL

Facebook has added a feature to its UK site that offers support to people who post suicidal messages. Built with help from the Samaritans, the tool will send a message to a user if a friend is worried about them. Facebook will give the suicidal user options to reply to their friend, and call a support helpline. Similar features were added to Facebook in the US and Australia last year.

MICROSOFT'S FIRST LAPTOP GOES ON SALE

Microsoft has launched its first-ever laptop – but it's not cheap. Prices for the Surface Book start at £1,299, which gives you 128GB of storage, an Intel i5 processor and 8GB RAM. There are three other models, with more storage and stronger processors. The most expensive (£2,249), comes with an Intel i5 processor and 512GB. Visit Microsoft's UK store for more info: www.snipca.com/19694. We will review it soon.

Unsubscribe now! The 15 worst companies for spam revealed

The companies that sent the most spam in 2015 have been named and shamed in a list of the 15 worst offenders.

They include Facebook, Twitter and clothing retailer Gap. But the most prolific spammer was Groupon, a hugely popular website that offers money-saving deals and discounts.

It sent an average of 388 emails to each subscriber in 2015, alerting them to new offers at a rate of more than one a day. Facebook sent the second most emails – on average 310 per user.

The list, called the 'Spammy Awards', was compiled by Unroll.me (https://unroll.me), an iPhone app that helps people unsubscribe from emails. Since launching in 2012, it claims it has helped users unsubscribe from more than 420 million emails.

It analysed unsubscribe data from its users to create the lists. Also in the top 15 were lingerie company Victoria's Secret and LinkedIn – a social network for business.

Unroll.me also revealed the 15 companies most people chose to unsubscribe from in 2015. This list was topped by StumbleUpon, which sends emails containing links to online content it thinks you'll want to read and watch.

It had an unsubscribe rate of 43 per cent, suggesting it is failing to live up to its promise of helping people "easily discover new and interesting stuff on the web".

Second was Live Nation, which sells tickets for pop and rock concerts. In third place came Goodreads, an Amazon-owned company that recommends books based on what you've read before.

However, despite the vast amount of spam they receive, Unroll.me users still subscribe to some of the world's biggest websites. Amazon leads the way, with over 44 per cent of users subscribing to its emails, followed by Facebook on 36 per cent and Twitter on 30 per cent.

You can scroll through Unroll.me's Spammy Awards at www.snipca.com/19714.

New Office tools come to Outlook.com

Microsoft has officially launched a new version of Outlook.com, after previewing it since May 2015.

It means that several new tools which have been tested will soon be available to all users, starting with those in the US. Microsoft said that the new Outlook.com will be rolled out to "millions of users each week".

If you're not an Outlook.com user, you can get these new tools straight away by creating an account (www.snipca.com/19713).

Many of the new tools make it easier for you to use Office programs within Outlook.

com. One of the best lets you edit something in Office – such as a Word document or Excel spreadsheet – and respond to a related email, side by side (see screenshot).

Skype has also been improved. You can now move between video calls and emails without affecting either.

Other companies have added tools, too. Microsoft calls these 'add-ins', which is a fitting name because they offer similar functions to browser add-ons.

For example, Microsoft has worked with Giphy (www.giphy.com) to make it easy to create GIFs in emails. These are quirky animations made up of static images.

Read more about the new tools on Microsoft's blog: www.snipca.com/19710. We'll explain them in more detail in our next issue – out Wednesday 16 March.

The world's gone mad!

As the migrant crisis worsened and the EU negotiations dragged on, what highly important event obsessed the UK's media? Stephen Fry quitting Twitter. He deleted his account after his "bag lady" joke at the BAFTAs was slated by the Twitter hordes for being offensive. It wasn't, of course – merely an in-joke between friends. It's hard to know whose response was more risible: Fry's strop, the Twitterati's self-righteousness – or the media for caring.

Porn sites will have to prove users are 18 or over

Pornography websites will be forced to prove that their users are aged 18 or over, under new Government proposals to protect children from sexual content online.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has outlined its plans for a public consultation that will include adult websites, internet service providers, charities, schools and parents. It follows a Conservative Party election manifesto pledge to enforce age checks on adult websites.

The Government said that the responsibility for introducing the system should fall "squarely on the shoulders of companies who create and profit from online pornography". It wants to create a team of regulators that can fine companies up to £250,000 for breaking the rules.

Baroness Shields, the Internet Safety and Security Minister, said: "Just as we do offline, we want to make sure children are prevented from accessing pornographic content online, which should only be viewed by adults".

It's not clear how the age-verification system would work, but porn sites could be required to ask users to prove their age by registering with their credit-card details. Alternatively, sites could use the electoral roll or mobile-phone accounts. Gambling sites already use similar methods to verify the age of users.

NSPCC chief executive Peter Wanless welcomed the proposals, saying they should be implemented "as a matter of urgency" to prevent children from developing a "warped view of sexual relationships".

He added: "Every day ChildLine receives calls and messages from young people who feel they are being badly affected by the way they and their friends can view unlimited online pornography".

His comments are backed up by several studies, including research from comScore indicating that in May 2015 1.4 million people under 18 visited porn sites.

You have until 12 April to comment on the proposals at www.snipca.com/19660.

Paedophiles swap photos on Facebook

Paedophiles are setting up secret groups on Facebook in order to swap photos showing the sexual abuse of children, a BBC investigation has found.

One group, called 'cute teen schoolies', contains photos of girls in school uniforms. Another group is being run by a convicted paedophile who is still on the sex offenders' register. Some photos had been stolen from blogs and school websites, while others had been covertly taken in public places.

However, Facebook refused to remove many of these images because they didn't breach the site's "community standards". One of the photos deemed acceptable by Facebook showed a young girl in a vest, next to which a user had commented "yum yum".

Anne Longfield, the Children's Commissioner for England, said that she was "shocked" that such photos were being allowed.

"Any parent or indeed child looking at those would know that they were not acceptable," she said.

The investigation brings into question Facebook's policy of allowing secret groups. They don't appear in search results on the site, and can be seen only by people belonging to them, letting paedophiles post obscene photos and comments without much fear of being caught.

Joining a secret group is by invite only. A BBC journalist was asked to join after going undercover using a fake Facebook profile.

Facebook's head of public policy Rishi Saha asked the BBC for more details so he could investigate the claims with his colleagues. He promised to "deal directly with law enforcement" to uncover the groups.

IN BRIEF

SEE PREVIEW OF NEW-LOOK FIREFOX

Mozilla has released preview images of how its Firefox browser will soon look. The screenshots show the browser's new Activity Stream, which positions History, Bookmarks, Downloads and Tabs under one heading. See if you like it by taking a look at www.snipca.com/19653.

PLAY 14,000 OLD ZX SPECTRUM GAMES

Sir Clive Sinclair has announced plans to revive his Spectrum computer as a portable games device. To fund it he hopes to raise £100,000 on the crowdfunding website Indiegogo (www.snipca.com/19655). Called the Vega+, it will come with 1,000 Spectrum games from the 1980s, with room to add up to 14,000 more. It follows Sinclair's successful campaign last year to raise funds for the Vega console (http://retro-computers.co.uk/vega).

WIKIPEDIA TO LAUNCH SEARCH ENGINE

Online encyclopedia Wikipedia is planning to take on Google by launching a search engine. Work has begun on the Knowledge Engine, which aims to be a "system for discovering reliable and trustworthy public information" on the web. In an FAQ page about the project (www.snipca.com/19658) Wikipedia says that it isn't intended to be a replacement for Google, but wants its searches to be more relevant and people to stay longer on its web pages when looking for information. It hopes building its own search engine will help to achieve this.

Named & Shamed

Jane Hoskyn puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software stuffed with junk

WARNING: Junk ahead

Junk offender: KMPlayer

When Microsoft ditched Windows Media Centre (WMC), adware-makers rejoiced. WMC's demise boosted demand for free media software (a favourite conduit for PUPs). So I wasn't surprised to find a dodgy search engine bundled with the popular WMC alternative KMPlayer, but I was shocked that it sneaked on to my PC before I'd even run KMPlayer's installer.

Worried users

Search Google for KMPlayer and you'd assume it's a top-notch program. It gets great reviews on Cnet's Download.com (one of KMPlayer's partners) and Softpedia (another partner – according to KMPlayer, anyway), and Wikipedia cites glowing reports (www.snipca.com/19690).

What Wikipedia doesn't mention is the concerns raised by security sites such as FixYourBrowser.com and by worried users on forums, including Yahoo (www.snipca.com/19703), AVG (www.snipca.com/19704) and KMPlayer's own site (www.snipca.com/19705).

KMPlayer pushes its own search engine before you even open its installer

I've seen replies by KMPlayer employees (including someone or something called 'Red Dawn') claiming the installer must have been infected with a 'virus' on a third-party downloads site. Maybe, but that's not the whole story.

KO KM

There's a clue to KMPlayer's dark side on the Wikipedia page: "This article contains content that is written like an advertisement (January 2016)". Marketing is KMPlayer's forte. Its website is a polished production that hits you with adware the moment you click Download.

The 'official KMPlayer new tab extension' box looks like terms and conditions (see screenshot). But unless you untick it, KMPlayer's search engine will infect your browser. I've seen reports that adware in its installer can attack your HTTPS encryption. That's similar behaviour to the infamous Superfish bug bundled with Lenovo laptops.

Tread very carefully with free media players. The best and safest is VLC (www.snipca.com/19693), a non-profit, open-source program that's constantly updated and patched.

What *are* they talking about?

What they say

Easy Solutions (www.snipca.com/19698)

"Once the software is deployed, it is not updated or changed with the exception of receiving application-level configuration files directly from the bank's driving system."

What they mean

Windows is harder to update on cash machines than on PCs – which is why the recent end of support for XP on them is such bad news.

Jane's villain of the fortnight

Direct Security Marketing Ltd

A spam call can ruin your day. There's something uniquely stressful about a stranger's voice on your private phone, selling stuff you don't want.

Now imagine that call comes in the middle of the night, causing you to rush half-awake in the dark, then trip and seriously injure yourself. That's what happened to one 84-year-old victim of UK cold-calling company Direct Security Marketing Ltd, which has been fined by the Information Commissioner's Office for making nearly 10,000 calls between 1am and 6am in just one month last year. Here's the ICO's report: www.snipca.com/19706 (opens as PDF).

Justice done? Well, no. The fine was a paltry £70,000, which will hardly put DSM out of business. This elderly victim survived her fall, but others may not. Unless companies like DSM are punished proportionately, spam calls will literally destroy lives.

Want to nominate a villain of the fortnight? Email us at editor@computeractive.co.uk

Question of the Fortnight

Why won't Apple unlock a terrorist's iPhone?

The FBI says Apple cares more about its reputation than fighting terrorism

The FBI has accused Apple of prioritising its reputation above public safety, after the company refused to unlock the iPhone of a terrorist gunman.

Investigators in the US want to access data stored on the iPhone that belonged to Syed Farook. In December, with his wife Tashfeen Malik, Farook killed 14 people in San Bernardino, California.

The US Department of Justice has filed a court order to force Apple to build new software that can crack the iPhone's encryption. It says that the investigation into the murders is being hindered by not having access to Farook's data. In particular, officials are still trying to determine to what extent the couple had been radicalised by Islamist groups such as ISIS, and whether they had contacted other terrorists.

> "The FBI thinks it's just a PR stunt to portray Apple as the defender of public privacy"

Apple said it will fight the order, calling it "chilling". Its CEO Tim Cook explained the company's position in a letter to customers (www.apple.com/customer-letter). He warned that the software could be used to "intercept your messages, access your health records or financial data, track your location, or even access your phone's microphone or camera".

Cook said that the FBI wants Apple to build a "backdoor" to decrypt the iPhone's operating system (iOS), something that, while technically feasible, is "too dangerous to create".

Attorneys for the Justice Department said that Apple's stance seems "to be based on concern for its business model and brand marketing strategy". They think it's just a PR stunt to portray Apple as the defender of public privacy.

Apple itself has admitted the risk of "reputational harm". During a separate US court case in October last year, Apple said that being forced to unlock iPhones and extract data would "threaten the trust between Apple and its customers and substantially tarnish the Apple brand".

Yet Apple hasn't always been so uncooperative. Prosecutors in the case last October pointed out that Apple had previously agreed to extract customer data from iPhones more than 70 times following requests from US investigators.

But there was a crucial difference in these cases. It involved handing over data that Apple could extract while the iPhone was locked. This meant Apple didn't need to create the backdoor decryption software the FBI is now calling for.

Privacy campaigners say such a tool could be used to unlock anyone's iPhone. Cook emphasised this danger in his letter: "In the physical world, it would be the equivalent of a master key, capable of opening hundreds of millions of locks – from restaurants and banks to stores and homes".

But the FBI insists that the tool would be used only once – to unlock Farook's phone. Apple could guarantee this, says one encryption expert. Dan Guido, from security company Trail of Bits, suggested on his blog (www.snipca.com/19723) that once Apple built the backdoor tool for iOS, the FBI should send Farook's iPhone to the company for examination. This would mean that the "customized version of iOS never physically leaves the Apple campus", and so never gets used on another iPhone.

Apple is playing a dangerous game. If, as Guido claims, Farook's phone can be unlocked without it leading to further invasions of privacy, then many people will wonder why the company is making such a big deal about the principle involved. The longer Apple refuses to help, the more its position could seem like arrogant posturing.

THE FACTS

- Apple is refusing to unlock the iPhone of terrorist Syed Farook, who killed 14 people in California
- The FBI wants Apple to weaken the phone's encryption to help with its investigation
- Prosecutors say Apple has previously allowed law-enforcement agencies to access iPhones 70 times

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind
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Upgrade to Windows 10? My £1500 hardware won't work

I read in Issue 469 Robert Mason's bizarre opinion of people who still use Windows XP. He reckons it's because they can't be bothered to learn a new operating system. So let's look at this more closely. Some people may be either too old or not interested in updating their operating system. Some people may well be happy using what they know and feel comfortable with it. Many people don't trust Microsoft, and can you really blame them?

I use Windows 7 Pro, and I will not change. Why? I use Microsoft Flight Simulator with over £400 of aircraft and scenery packs, and over £1,500 worth of hardware. Very little of this software will work on Windows 10, and 90 per cent of the hardware won't. So Mr Mason, don't be so presumptuous. Maybe you are happy using your PC for browsing and email, but when complex and very expensive software and hardware is involved, the situation is different.

Jeremy Newman

Windows 10 apps: keep 'Get Started'

Issue 468's Cover Feature ('Uninstall Windows 10 Apps Now') was another excellent checklist from Jonathan Parkyn. I totally agree with most of his recommendations. But not all. First, I would say 'keep' the 'Get Started' app. Although the information is available elsewhere if you search for it, 'Get Started' gives it to you in a quick and easy form. I recommend it as a primer for anyone new to Windows 10, to dip into as and when needed.

Also, many people will find the basic functions provided by the 'Photos' app to be perfectly adequate. The same goes for 'Camera' (if your device has one) and 'Maps' (which I sometimes use as an alternative to Google Maps; both have their strengths). In all these cases I suggest you review them before you ditch them.

Finally, 'Phone Companion' may not be useful to people with iOS or Android phones, but those with Windows phones may find it increasingly useful as Windows 10 develops.

Maurice Durbin

Don't knock the Raspberry Pi: the kids love it

Your dear Ken Rigsby – by deriding the Raspberry Pi (The Final Straw, Issue 469) – is acting exactly like the toddler he refers to. When he can't get anything to work, he jumps up and down, sobs like a baby and throws the thing out of his playpen. Unfortunately, he also thinks all modern-day kids have the mindset of a moron.

To be fair, many may have that mindset. But others are using the Pi to create robots, quadcopter control systems, weather stations and media centres. They have also created the Raspberry Pi experiments that went up to the International Space Station with Tim Peake.

The Final Straw
Raspberry Pi

In fact anything you can do with a PC you can do with a Raspberry Pi. Ken no doubt has trouble painting walls – "it's too hard, don't know where to start" – and gets a "man" in to do it. I'm glad that any technological advancement doesn't depend on Ken. I doubt that Steve Wozniak (the *real* inventor of the Apple PC) threw his first failed attempt to program his nascent computer across the room, turned on the TV then watched *Popeye* for the rest of the day.

Dr Colin R Lloyd

Can someone please untwist Ken Rigsby's knickers? I can't fathom why he worked himself into such a tizzy over something as innocuous as the Raspberry Pi. He says it's a "dire" introduction to computing, but that's an opinion the children in my school (I'm a science teacher) would disagree with.

Nobody is pretending that using the Pi turns you into Bill Gates – you need years of practice and dedication. But it does show what's possible for just £20 or so. The kids I teach love it, as do my children. They see it as simply the first step on a very long ladder of discovery. I think it's doing a great job at inspiring a new generation of programmers and computer whizzkids.

Jennifer Peacock

Don't persecute password novices

If Len Longford ever rules the world, I'm going to volunteer to be on the first manned mission to Mars ('Ban people who use stupid passwords', Letters, Issue 469). Obviously his hardline stance is tongue in cheek, but he hardly sounds like a particularly tolerant fellow nonetheless.

What he doesn't seem to realise is that many people who use guessable passwords probably don't know any better. Most of them are likely to be new to computers and the internet, and just want something easy to remember. It's counter-productive to condemn these people as stupid.

If they do get hacked we should sympathise with them, and offer advice so it doesn't happen again.

I'm a good example. When I first started using the internet about 15 years ago, I didn't realise how important it was to use strong passwords. I got lucky. I now use special tools that create passwords that are designed to be unhackable. It's some relief to me that Sir Len, Ruler of the World, would approve!

Simon McDaid

Raspberry Pi is rotting on my shelf

Has Ken Rigsby been looking through my cupboards? In The Final Straw (Issue 469) he said that lots of Raspberry Pis were bought, then abandoned to "gather dust" on shelves. That's exactly what happened to the one I bought a few years ago. I thought it would help me teach my grandchildren about computers, but they took one look at it, laughed at me and went back to their iPads! They tell me that they can learn more about programming and coding using online courses than with the Raspberry Pi. I'm never going to use it, so it's just taking up shelf space. Anyone want it? Yours for 50p!

Frank Saunders

Did Microsoft listen to my Solitaire feedback?

I have Windows 10 and play Spider Solitaire on it. A little while ago a questionnaire about Solitaire appeared on my PC. I responded, saying I'd like the pile of cards to be shown at an angle (just as they were in XP), so you can see how many are left.

Today, when I opened Solitaire, guess what? The cards were arranged as I'd suggested! This begs the question, did the mighty Microsoft really take notice of what I said? I'd like to think so. But I suspect the truth is that they were just waiting for a million people to suggest it before they got round to re-arranging the cards. Still, it's nice to play the game thinking that I might have had some input into how it now looks.

Angela Thorne

BT has become 'too big and arrogant'

When companies get too big, they become arrogant and delusional. I fear that has happened to BT, having read 'Question of the Fortnight' in Issue 469 ('Is BT treating the British public like fools?'). For BT's press officers to mock a Government report betrays the company's complacency. They have ruled the roost for so long they think they're untouchable.

I used to be a BT Broadband customer, but switched after getting the distinct impression they were taking me for granted. Customer service was a joke. There was no urgency about anything they ever did. I switched to Virgin, and then Sky. Both these companies treat their customers better, and that's because – in my opinion at least – they haven't become fat, bloated, lazy monopolies.

Those cocky BT press officers shouldn't fear being split from Openreach. They might even find that a streamlined BT would make a better, more successful company to work for.

Eric Walton

I want call-centre accents I can understand

Richard Langham may be right that Indian call centres are "patient and helpful" (Letters, Issue 469), but the point is that I become impatient when I can't understand what they say. I don't mean to do so, but I just can't help it. When I ring a company called *British* Telecom, surely the least I should expect is an accent I can understand? I don't think that's unreasonable.

Ken Westwood

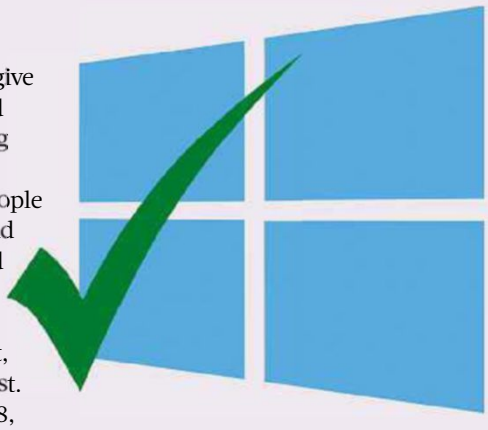
Friends Reunited 'killed my marriage'

There were no tears shed for the closure of Friends Reunited in my household. I won't go into details, but my marriage ended as a result of my ex-wife seeking out an old lover on the site. Friends Reunited would never admit this, but they made money out of other people's misery. It always marketed itself as a way to track down long-lost friends, but almost everyone I knew at the time used it for more romantic purposes. Facebook is very different. It's more about celebrating current friendships, not rekindling old ones.

Name and address supplied

STAR LETTER

Windows 10: sooner we all upgrade, the better



Sometimes you just have to give in, shrug your shoulders and accept what's inevitable. I'm talking about Windows 10, and Microsoft's seemingly non-stop effort to get people to upgrade. I urge all Windows 7 and 8.1 users to just go for it. I upgraded to Windows 10 in November, and have had very few problems. I was a reluctant Windows 10 user at first, but now I'd call myself an enthusiast. It's the exact opposite of Windows 8, which confused me the more I used it. By contrast, Windows 10 gets easier every day.

What people seem to be forgetting is that Windows 10 will be the last upgrade you'll ever need to make. Microsoft has said it will be the final version of Windows. You'll receive updates, but these will be to add new features and fix security holes. Never again will you need to actually learn a new operating system. It's a bit like learning to drive. You only do this once, although you do have to get to know every new car you buy. Windows 10 is the same. Every new update will add things you'll need to familiarise yourself with, but it's not like having to start from scratch with Windows, which is what I felt when I upgraded from 7 to 8. I'm looking forward to the next 'Redstone' update, especially if it brings much-needed improvements to Cortana.

Microsoft's tactics may be a bit intimidating, but they are actually doing the right thing by trying to push everyone on to Windows 10. The sooner it happens, the better it will be for all PC users. Sorry, I know this will upset people, but it's just true.

Ian Stannard

The Star Letter writer wins a *Computeractive* mug!

Consumeractive

Can I test a phone before committing to a contract?

Q Before I sign another two-year contract for a mobile phone, I want to test it to see if I can see the screen in bright sunlight, and whether the internal memory will be sufficient. My high-street provider won't let me examine phones outside the shop, or exchange one after I've bought it. So is there a way I can legally test a phone?

Ray Leatham

A Yes, there is. The simplest way is to buy the phone online, giving you 14 days to reject it for *any* reason (under the Consumer Contract Regulations). This cooling-off period doesn't cover goods bought in the shops, but some companies do let you test phones bought in the high street. Virgin and O2, for example, give you 14 days, during which you're allowed to make calls, send texts and access the internet. Most retailers will also let you download apps, but check this first. And bear in mind that you'll be liable for any charges, such as the cost of any calls and texts, plus data usage.

Does an OS problem leave me with no rights?

Q In November 2015, I bought from PC World an Acer laptop running Windows 10. After four weeks I wasn't able to use the main app screen, which appeared to be a problem with the operating system (OS) rather than the laptop. I took it into PC World for repair. The technician claimed to have fixed it, but it's still not working properly. PC World said it would charge me £50 to send away for repair because Windows 10 isn't covered in its guarantee. Acer also says its warranty doesn't cover operating systems. Have I any rights?

Arthur Cooper

A Yes, Arthur does have rights because under the Consumer Rights Act, a PC retailer must make sure that built-in software works, because it's a crucial part of the overall package that's been sold to the customer.

Acer's warranty may not include software, but it doesn't matter. Firms don't have to offer warranties; they do so as a way of expressing confidence in their products. And because Acer didn't make Windows 10, it's saying it can't be confident of software it did not develop. What matters is that Acer made a laptop with Windows 10, and PC World sold it. Mentioning the warranty is probably just an attempt to deter Arthur from claiming a refund.

The only time PC World can use its software-exempt policy and charge Arthur £50 for a repair is if he installed the software that caused the problem. But in this case the fault lies with software Acer pre-installed – namely Windows 10. This means PC World is responsible for fixing the fault, or refunding him. Because PC World has been given one chance at a repair, Arthur can now demand a full refund or a replacement. We'll let you know which Arthur decides, and PC World's response.

How long should I wait for a refund?

Q I bought some photo paper online, but then cancelled the order before it was sent to me. However, I've not yet been refunded. I was promised this would happen within three to four days, but it's now 11 days and I'm still waiting for my money. Has the company broken the law?

Joan Patterson

A Not yet, because companies have 14 days to refund customers. This period applies whether you cancel an order before the goods leave the retailer's warehouse, or reject an item after it's arrived at your door. If you've cancelled but the item still arrives, you can refuse to accept delivery, which means you won't have to pay return postage.

Bear in mind that the Consumer Contract Regulations, which came into force in June 2014, give retailers far more protection than before, particularly in relation to the condition of an item's packaging. If you haven't been able to refuse delivery – it's been left with a neighbour, say – don't open the parcel except to remove any necessary documentation needed to send it back. If you damage any packaging that's integral to the product, such as the box, the retailer can deduct money off your refund.

We stand up for your legal rights

Contact us so we can investigate your case

Email: consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk
Write: Consumeractive, Computeractive, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD
Please include both your phone number and address.
Unfortunately, we can't reply to all your letters.

Can Vodafone charge me because I forgot to hang up?

Q Just before Christmas I hung up on a nuisance call. Then I attempted to block the phone number – but instead reconnected to the nuisance caller. I forgot to end the call and found the next day I'd ramped up a bill of £213 because I was on the line for over seven hours. Vodafone says we must pay up. I admit I was to blame, but do I *have* to pay?

David Kay

A This is an unfortunate case. As David realises, Vodafone is legally entitled to ask him to pay. But this seems like the kind of case that companies sometimes treat favourably as a goodwill gesture, so it's worth asking Vodafone to cut him some slack. Evidence always helps, so we gave Vodafone the number of the nuisance caller. The company said it will consider David's position, and also examine whether it can prevent something similar happening to other customers.

The problem occurs when the person making the outgoing call doesn't hang up. That was David in this case, because he was trying to reconnect to the nuisance caller in order to block him. David was unintentionally performing what's known as the 'line blocking' trick that scammers often use. This is when they call you, but don't hang up when *you* do. When you next use the phone, the scammer is still there ready to pounce.

Another tactic they use is to persuade you that you need to urgently transfer money into a bank account. They then pretend to hang up, but secretly remain on the line for several minutes. If you ring your bank during this time, you'll actually get through to the scammer, who will take your bank details.

CASE UPDATE

Apple's staff relent and give customer a new iPhone

Whether you get a satisfactory outcome to a complaint can depend on the quality of help offered by sales assistants, as *Computeractive* reader John Chisem recently discovered. As we explained in Issue 469, he struggled persuading staff at an Apple store that the battery in his refurbished iPhone wouldn't charge. He also suspected the phone was inherently faulty.

At first, Apple's staff were adamant there was nothing wrong with the battery. They even tried to sell him another refurbished model. But it seemed clear to us that the phone had a fault which couldn't be fixed, and therefore John was entitled to a refund or a repair. Apple tried to fob him off by saying its 90-day warranty had expired, but that is irrelevant if an item has an inherent flaw. The law does take into account that refurbished products won't last as long as new ones, but John's phone had failed after only eight months. No customer should be expected to put up with that. Armed with this knowledge, John went back to his Apple store. This time a different sales assistant was more sympathetic and agreed to replace the phone for free.

You should take heart from this outcome – if you have a broken iPhone, be persistent with Apple's staff. You may soon have another option, because Apple is extending its 'Reuse and Recycle' scheme (www.snipca.com/19633), which lets you hand in old devices for credit towards a new one. In the US Apple is expanding this to include damaged devices. Hopefully Apple will introduce this in the UK soon. Read more on our sister website Alphr: www.snipca.com/19632.

THIS WILL COME IN USEFUL

Warranty details

Acer
www.snipca.com/19621

Amazon
www.snipca.com/19622

Apple
www.snipca.com/19620

Asus
www.asus.com/uk/support

Canon
www.snipca.com/19627

Crucial
www.snipca.com/19635

Dell
www.snipca.com/19617

Devolo
www.snipca.com/19628

Epson
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Google
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Samsung
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Sony
www.snipca.com/19624

Toshiba
www.snipca.com/19623

Protect Your Tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

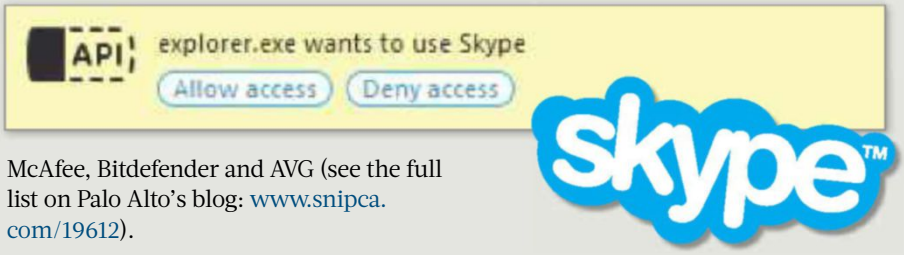
WATCH OUT FOR...

Skype malware recording your calls

What happened?

A new malware was discovered that records your Skype calls (both video and audio) and chat messages, and also takes screenshots. These are then uploaded to a server, from which hackers can access any personal information you may may have revealed while chatting.

What makes the malware particularly effective is that it identifies which antivirus you're running, then takes evasive measures to avoid being detected by it. This clever ploy was spotted by researchers at security company Palo Alto Networks, who named the malware T9000. They said that it can spot the presence of 24 different antivirus programs, including products by many of the leading companies like Kaspersky, Norton, McAfee, Bitdefender and AVG (see the full list on Palo Alto's blog: www.snipca.com/19612).



What should you do?

You should be wary about opening emails that contain a .RTF file as an attachment. This is how T9000 initially gets on to your PC, so open attachments only when you trust the sender.

The malware then tries to trick you into granting it permission to access your Skype account. It does this by showing you the message 'explorer.exe wants to use Skype' when you launch Skype (see image). This sounds like a request from Windows Explorer to access Skype, but it's actually T9000 in disguise. You should always click 'Deny access', never 'Allow access'.

Microsoft, which owns Skype, says it has updated Windows Defender so it detects T9000. It also said that Skype users should make sure they have the latest version installed. You can check your version using Microsoft's instructions at www.snipca.com/19613.

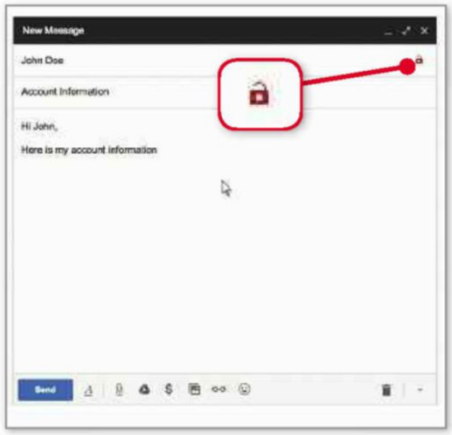
New tools

Gmail's email warnings

www.snipca.com/19611

When you send an email using Gmail, Google will try to keep it private using TLS (Transport Layer Security), a strong form of encryption that usually thwarts hackers. We say 'try' because Google can only encrypt one half of the email process. The person sending or receiving your email may use a service that doesn't support encryption.

To help protect you, Google will now warn you when you're about to send a message to – or receive one from – a service that doesn't use TLS. The warning appears as an unlocked padlock icon in the top-right of the email (see screenshot). If it appears in an email you're about to write, you should probably think twice about including sensitive information.



Google will also now warn you if the sender of an email "can't be authenticated", which will protect you from spam emails. Look out for a question mark where the avatar should be. Click the link above to read more info on Gmail's blog.

ScamWatch

READERS WARN READERS

Don't claim compensation for Microsoft scam

A couple of years ago I was targeted by those phone scammers who pretend to be from Microsoft. I got an email promising me compensation for the scam. The email comes from **uk.govdepartment _refund98@outlook.com** and an organisation called the 'ALL Competition and Consumer Commission'. I Googled this and realised it was another scam (more info at www.snipca.com/19592). So scammers are trying to trick people into claiming compensation for distress caused by other scammers! Unbelievable! We need tougher laws to catch them.

Maureen Williamson

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

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BROWSER

Opera 35

www.opera.com/computer

What you need: Windows 7, 8/8.1 or 10

Opera has been around for much longer than Chrome or Edge – in fact it's now 21 years old. But it still leads the pack in terms of experimentation, and this new release contains new features that may pop up in rival browsers soon.

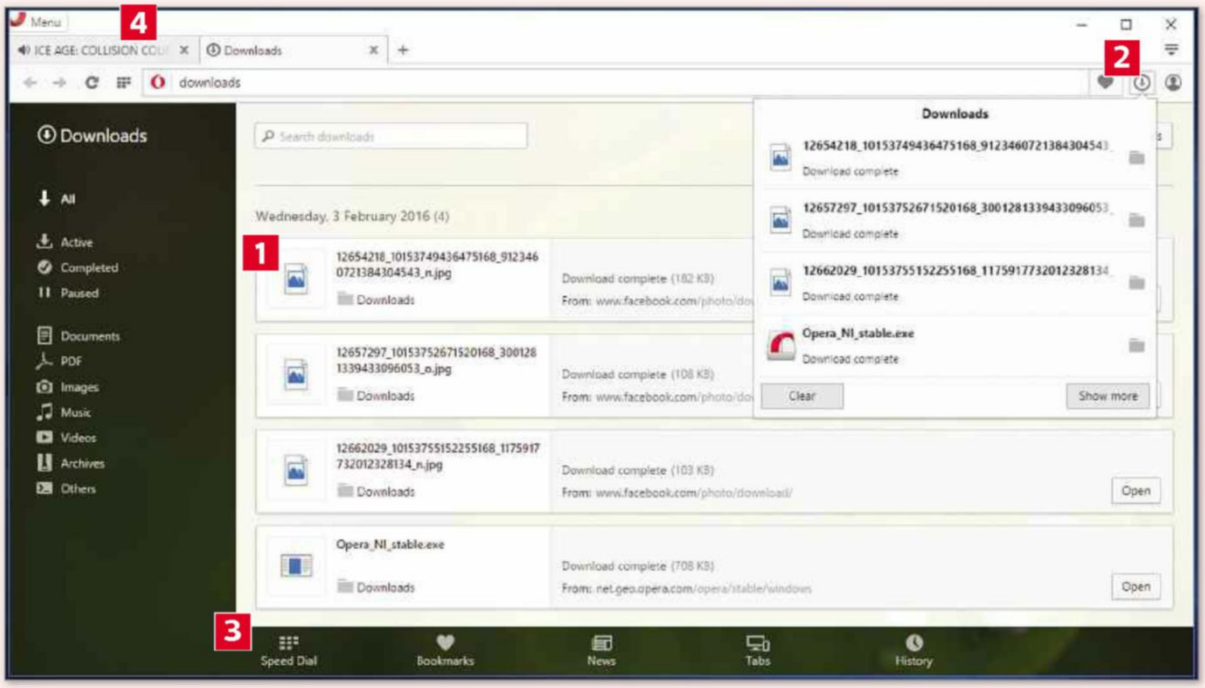
For example, Opera now lets you mute any open tab without closing it simply by hovering over the offending tab and clicking the speaker icon that appears. That's handy for silencing adverts that suddenly burst into life while you're writing an email. It's simple but revolutionary, and we immediately found ourselves looking in vain for an equivalent mute icon in our other browsers (it requires a right-click in Chrome).

We're also fans of the much-improved Downloads dropdown box. With one click, you get instant access to recently downloaded files, including program installers, PDFs and photos. The new Downloads page, pictured below, sorts downloads into formats and includes shortcuts to all open tabs and the Speed Dial homepage – an existing Opera idea that was later taken up by Chrome and Firefox.

Opera 35 also introduces powerful new customisation options for downloads, bookmarks, cookies and start-up activity. Settings is easy to open from any tab by clicking the Menu button at the top-left.

To try this trailblazing browser, go to the link above and click the green 'Download now' button, then save and run the installer ('Opera_NI_stable.exe'). There's no junk to opt out of, but you should click Options in the installer window and untick 'Import bookmarks and data from your default browser' to avoid messing up your existing browser settings. Opt out of setting Opera as your default browser if you just want to try it.

There's also a portable version of the installer that you can run without having to be online. To get it, click 'Download the offline package' below the green button.

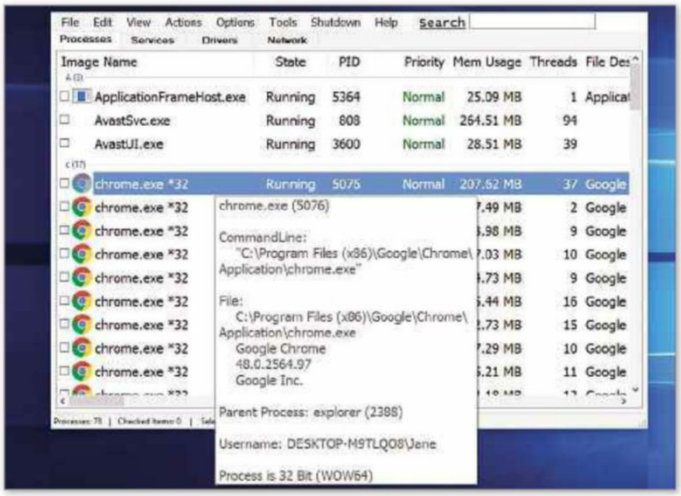


1 Opera's new Downloads page sorts your downloaded files into format categories such as Images (photos) and Archives (ZIP and RAR files).

2 To check recent downloads in a dropdown box, click the arrow icon. There's also an 'Add to bookmarks' shortcut (heart icon) and a sync settings shortcut (person icon).

3 The Downloads page also gives you quick access to other useful pages, including Speed Dial (homepage with site shortcuts) and Tabs (all open tabs).

4 You can now mute any tab without closing it. Hover over it and click the speaker icon. Alternatively, right-click your current tab then click 'Mute other tabs'.



TASK MANAGER TOOL

Listp

www.snipca.com/19573

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

Task Manager has always been one of Windows' greatest missed opportunities. Even its improved Windows 10 incarnation offers far less information about your PC's background activity than it could and should. Listp is a portable open-source program that gives you this missing detail about running processes, services and network activity - including each item's IP address and command-line path, and details of all your installed drivers. Click the green Download button to download the ZIP file, then extract its contents and click the program file ('LISTP.exe') to run it. There's no setup wizard to worry about, but you may need to install the latest .NET software framework before the program will run. If so, you'll see a box inviting you to download it with one click.

START MENU TOOL

Labrys

http://vtt.to/labrys

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10

This new tool is a little like Classic Shell (www.classicshell.net), beloved by Windows 8/8.1 users who want their Windows 7-style Start menu back – but with more emphasis on sheer efficiency.

By default Labrys lists all your installed programs and Windows apps in alphabetical order, giving you one-click access from the Windows button. It also includes a Run shortcut for command-line tasks and can be customised to list favourite folders and settings. To get it, click 'Labrys Installer.exe' and then run the quick, junk-free installer. It replaces your Start menu until you uninstall it.

WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software to use

What should we use to transfer old programs to our new PC?

Q Our family recently bought a new Windows 10 PC. Our old Windows 7 PC has a lot of software that we paid for, and we want to transfer it to the new computer. We don't want to buy expensive transfer software. Are there any cheap or free programs we can use instead?
Edward Adams (aged 9)

A This problem once had an easy answer. Microsoft's free Windows Easy Transfer tool (WET, www.snipca.com/19568) lets you move programs and other data between PCs running Windows XP, Vista and 7 - but not to Windows 8/8.1 or 10.

Microsoft Community members have posted tricks for making WET work in Windows 10 (www.snipca.com/19565, see the post by 'champlagne'), so you could try those.

Microsoft wants you to use Laplink PCmover Professional (www.snipca.com/19567), but it costs £41.95 - and that's a "special offer" via Microsoft. The free version, PCmover Express (www.snipca.com/19566), lets you transfer only files and settings, not programs. The same goes for the free version of popular program EaseUS Todo PCTrans (www.snipca.com/19569, pictured).

The Professional version of PCTrans (www.snipca.com/19570) does let you transfer programs and costs $49.99 (£34) - much less than some harder-to-use rivals. Thankfully it has a free-trial period, which may be enough time to move all your software. EaseUS also offers lots of online advice for moving your programs and data to Windows 10 (www.snipca.com/19571).

Do you need our advice on what software to use? Just email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

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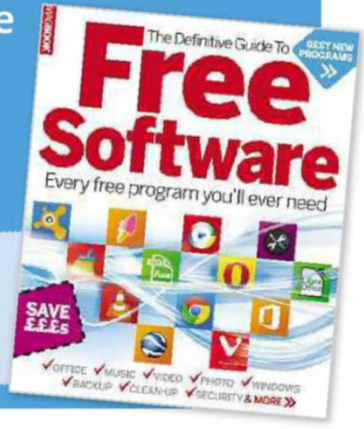

Reviews

New products tested by our experts

PC | **£800** from PC World www.snipca.com/19640

Lenovo Ideacentre AIO 700

An affordable all-in-one with a Full HD touchscreen

Once upon a time, every computer was a big box with a screen on the front and the electronics stuffed behind. Then everything got separated into different parts, so you could choose which elements you wanted to combine. And now we've come full circle. One way or another, most computers you buy today are in once piece (give or take the odd keyboard, mouse or stylus).

> "A neat all-in-one that performs well, is designed well and recognises your face"

When you compare them to a desktop tower system PC, all-in-ones have both pros and cons. While the Ideacentre AIO 700 doesn't avoid all the cons – this isn't the PC to pick if you want room to upgrade its components in the future, for example – it makes the most of the pros. The matt white plastic finish looks decent and the design is quite elegant. A one-piece stand attaches with thumbscrews and provides easy tilt adjustment.

If the thick edges feel chunky, there are benefits: two USB 3.0 ports, a headphone jack and an SD card slot are easily reachable on the left edge, rather than being hidden round the back. Another USB 3.0 and two slower USB 2.0 ports are also available on the rear, along with an HDMI connector for a second monitor and another that lets you use the Ideacentre as a screen for another PC or device. That's a very handy option that the more expensive iMac lacks.

There's a Gigabit Ethernet socket so you can connect directly to your broadband router, but with 801.11ac Wi-Fi built in, wireless is just as good. Finally, on the right-hand side is a DVD drive, another iMac-beating feature that'll be handy for installing older software or watching your film collection. The speakers on the front are loud and clear, once you turn off the unnecessary Dynamic setting in the Dolby Audio app.

The Ideacentre is well equipped on the inside, too. Its Intel i5 processor comes from the latest 'Skylake' range, and with a sensible 8GB of memory it flies through most tasks. Photo- and HD video-editing will be no problem, and the 2TB hard drive guarantees plenty of room for all your files. The Nvidia GeForce GT 930A graphics card isn't amazing, but you'll be able to play 3D games with some of the settings turned down.

An unexpected feature is a RealSense webcam. This new technology from Intel enables Windows 10's 'Hello' feature, which unlocks your PC when it recognises your face, and works with a small but growing number of games and graphics programs, several of which are included for free. It's great fun, and means you won't miss out if more interesting uses for RealSense come along later.

The biggest catch of an all-in-one is that the computer will only be as good as the screen, and the Ideacentre AIO 700's screen could be better. It's touch-sensitive so you can scroll down with your fingers. While this isn't essential in a desktop PC, it's certainly a bonus, and its Full HD (1920x1080-pixel) resolution is adequate for a 24in display. But contrast is low, and at 92 per cent of the sRGB range its colour reproduction is only just acceptable for graphics tasks. Still, it's better than the rival HP Pavilion 23, and if you feel the need for a higher-quality monitor you can add one, giving you more space to work.

The new Ideacentre AIO 700 (not to be confused with the older model, which used an AMD processor, or Lenovo's similar-looking C series) is a very good all-in-one PC. You could buy a comparable tower system and a budget monitor for anything up to £100 less, but this is a much neater arrangement.

SPECIFICATIONS

Intel Core i5-6400 processor • 8GB memory • 2TB hard drive • Nvidia GeForce GT 930A graphics • 23.8in 1920x1080-pixel touchscreen • 3x USB 3.0 • 3x USB 2.0 • HDMI output • HDMI input • SD card slot • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Gigabit Ethernet • Windows 10 • 461x579x210mm (HxWxD) • 7.5kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19639

VERDICT: Although the screen's nothing special, this capable all-in-one is a good buy

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: HP Pavilion 23 £650
Although its simpler design looks better at first glance, this all-in-one is outclassed in every other way by the Ideacentre

LAPTOP-TABLET HYBRID | **£230** from PC World www.snipca.com/19581

Acer Chromebook R11

The first Chrome convertible

Google's Chrome OS software has created a whole new class of low-cost PCs. This is the first one we've seen that incorporates another trend: convertibles. The Chromebook R11's touchscreen can fold all the way round until its back is flat against the keyboard, so you can hold it like a tablet. The 360-degree hinge is also handy to prop up the R11 to watch a film or play a game.

This doesn't make quite as much sense as with laptops that run Windows 10, which has a special tablet mode. Chrome OS doesn't, and not all of the apps and online services you might want to use are designed to work by touch. But most websites these days take touchscreens into account, and basic operations such as scrolling feel natural. The keyboard is automatically disabled and, just like on a tablet, a virtual keyboard appears on the screen whenever you need to type text.

> "It coped fine with word processing, emails and YouTube"

If the Chromebook R11 looks a little familiar, that's because the hardware is similar to Acer's Aspire R11, which runs Windows. This model's all-white finish looks neater, though. There seems to be some variation in responsiveness between the touchpads on different samples of the R11, which might reflect the machine's budget build quality, but we found this one smoother than the Aspire we tested previously.

Chromebooks aren't intended for ambitious creative tasks, so they generally have bog-standard screens. The R11 is no exception. Its 11.6in LCD panel doesn't go very bright or show particularly accurate or vivid colours. But with good contrast, the modest 1366x768-pixel resolution looks fairly clear. Decent speakers are built in, too, although a quirk of the design means that they get slightly muffled when the screen is folded back.

The Intel Celeron N3050 processor doesn't draw much power, so the R11 can work without fans, making it silent in use. The battery lasted us eight hours and 45 minutes of video playback, shorter than many Chromebooks, but still not bad. It coped fine with word processing, emails, YouTube and even a bit of photo editing. Web pages loaded smoothly as long as we didn't keep too many tabs open. With just 16GB of storage, less than two per cent of the average hard drive, you'll need to embrace 'the cloud': only keeping a few Chrome-compatible apps and files on the laptop for when you can't get an internet connection, and accessing everything else on the web.

We've seen the Chromebook R11 discounted to as little as £160, which is an absolute bargain. Even at its regular price of around £230, it's good value.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.6GHz Intel Celeron N3050 processor • 2GB memory • 16GB flash storage • 11.6in 1366x768-pixel screen • Webcam • SD card slot • 1x USB 2.0 port • 1x USB 3.0 port • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • Chrome OS • 20x295x203mm (HxWxD) • 1.2kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19581

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Dennis Publishing, which owns a hi-tech facility for testing the latest technology. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Dennis Publishing also owns the magazines *PC Pro*, *Computer Shopper*, *Web User* and *Micro Mart* and the website Expert Reviews (www.expertreviews.co.uk). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

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Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Great Pick award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT: It's not without compromises, including Chrome OS itself, but this is a well-designed budget laptop that's enjoyable to own

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Asus C201 Chromebook £197 This conventional Chromebook lasts up to 13 hours on a charge, but the screen is duller and won't fold back

LAPTOP-TABLET HYBRID | **£699** from HP www.snipca.com/19656

HP Spectre x2

A highly desirable Windows 10 hybrid

The concept behind a laptop-tablet hybrid isn't just about being able to switch between the two types of device. It's also about the kind of apps you need. An iPad or Android tablet runs the same kind of software as a smartphone, while a hybrid such as Microsoft's Surface Pro 4 runs Windows 10 – like a PC.

HP's new Spectre x2 is obviously designed to go up against the Surface Pro 4. It's detachable, meaning the keyboard clips on when you need it. When you don't, the touchscreen part works as a self-contained tablet. Like the Surface Pro 4, it has an integrated kick stand that folds out to prop it up on a desk, because there's no hinge to hold it in place. The Spectre x2's stand is fiddly and less sturdy, but it does the job.

> "It looks classy, with a great keyboard and processor – shame about the screen"

Unlike Microsoft, HP includes the keyboard as standard. Its silver finish looks classy enough, although the speaker along the back didn't live up to its Bang & Olufsen logo. The keys themselves were as good as the Surface Pro's, enabling accurate typing, and the touchpad worked well, except that our fingers occasionally strayed off its narrow area.

As a tablet, the Spectre x2 is light and uncluttered. The supplied stylus isn't as precise as Microsoft's, but it's a useful option for drawing and note-taking, as long as you don't lose it: HP gives you nowhere to store it.

There are only two USB ports, both of the new Type-C variety. One is used for charging, so when the device is plugged in you only have one free for accessories such as a mouse, external hard drive or full-size monitor, all of which will need adapters. But that's a reasonable compromise for a machine that mostly won't need such peripherals.

We weren't so happy to find HP had compromised on the screen. Brightness and contrast are good, and the Full HD (1920x1080p) resolution is fine at this size. The problem is colour: with less than 75 per cent of the sRGB range covered, everything looks rather lifeless. This is definitely not a good choice if viewing and editing photos is important to you, which is disappointing considering the Surface Pro 4's exceptional colour accuracy.

On the inside, the Spectre x2 does match its Microsoft rival, with an Intel Core M3 processor that's more than capable of running Windows 10 smoothly. Advanced tasks like video editing were just about feasible, and everyday stuff like web browsing zipped along without a stutter. You can't take that for granted with the less powerful processors in lower-cost hybrids. We even got some 3D games running with very low quality settings. The battery only lasted just over six hours of video playback, which isn't great, but you'd get through a full day of light use.

Is the Spectre x2 worth £699? HP's cheapest Windows 10 detachable, the 10in Pavilion x2, is a third of the price, but it's smaller and has far less processing power. Since we tested it, HP has released a 12in Pavilion x2 with an M3 processor for £499. Although it's bulkier than the Spectre, comes with less storage and lacks the fancy cameras, it's got to be worth considering.

As for the Surface Pro 4, it starts at £50 more than the Spectre x2, again with half the storage, and Microsoft charges another £110 for the keyboard. Display quality aside, the Spectre x2 clearly looks the better buy.

SPECIFICATIONS

0.9GHz Intel M3-6Y30 dual-core processor • 4GB memory • 256GB flash storage • 12in 1920x1280-pixel touchscreen • 5-megapixel front camera • RealSense 3D webcam • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • 2x USB 3.0 Type-C ports • SD card reader • Windows 10 • 13x303x209mm (HxWxD) • 1.19kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19656

VERDICT: Although it's let down by a poor screen, the Spectre x2 is a neat and capable hybrid that gives Microsoft a run for its money

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Microsoft Surface Pro 4 £749 (without keyboard) It has a much better screen, but its processor is no faster. Add a keyboard and you'll have to pay £849

PHONE | **£265** from Debenhams Plus www.snipca.com/19603

Samsung Galaxy S5 Neo

So good they launched it twice

It's déjà vu all over again. Two years ago, Samsung introduced the Galaxy S5, a high-end plastic smartphone with a big screen. It was very good, but very similar to the previous year's S4, except for the addition of a fingerprint sensor. Now, Samsung has removed the fingerprint sensor and relaunched the phone as the S5 Neo. Call us pedantic, but 'neo' is Greek for 'new'. This phone is about as new as the Acropolis.

Even so, it's actually a great idea. Essentially, you're getting an improved version of a full-priced phone for under £300. And Samsung has even made improvements in certain areas.

Rated IP67 waterproof and dustproof, the case (available in black, silver or gold) may not be as sleek as aluminium but it's sturdier than glass, and easier to grip than both. The somewhat fussy detailing around the edges serves a practical purpose: this is one of the few smartphones you can open up if necessary, for example to replace the battery when it wears out in a few years. That'll be a lot cheaper than an official repair.

> "An improved version of a full-priced phone for under £300"

There's only 16GB of built-in storage, but the S5 Neo also has a microSD slot for standard cards, from around £10 for 32GB to £40 for 128GB. Samsung's slightly messy Touchwiz version of Android runs on an eight-core Exynos processor that's even faster than the original Snapdragon 801, and apart from the occasional brief pause we found everything smooth as silk. Best of all, the battery lasted 16-and-a-half hours of video playback, which in normal use meant we could easily last two days on a charge – much better than most smartphones.

Buying a cheaper phone often means compromising on the display, but the S5 Neo's Full HD (1920x1080-pixel) AMOLED screen is exactly what you'd expect on a top-of-the-range Samsung device, with vivid colour and good contrast, albeit modest brightness. And the S5's 16-megapixel camera still produces excellent pictures.

At a similar price, the OnePlus 2 (£249 from www.snipca.com/19608) has a bigger screen and 64GB of storage, but it's only available direct from its Chinese manufacturer and the battery lasts nowhere near as long. Google's Nexus 5X – around £75 more expensive – has a fingerprint sensor and feels easier to use, but it's still a similarly sized plastic phone. So it's hard to fault the S5 Neo's value for money.

SPECIFICATIONS

5.1in 1920x1080-pixel screen • 16-megapixel rear camera • 5-megapixel front camera • 16GB flash storage • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.1 • 3G/4G • Android 5.1 • 142x73x8.1mm (HxWxD) • 145g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19604

VERDICT: It may look three years old, but this new-on-the-inside phone gives you all the features you really need

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung Galaxy S6 £400 The S5's successor is sharper, slimmer and faster, but its 32GB of storage isn't expandable and it costs significantly more

The best... Protective phone cases

ShieldX2Plus

£60 from ShieldX2
www.snipca.com/19695

The clear back panel of this case is moulded to fit your Apple, HTC, Samsung or Sony phone, providing basic protection. A separate rigid screen shield clings to the front glass to guard against impact. The ShieldX2's selling point is the Protection Promise: your phone will be repaired or replaced for a fixed £20 fee if it gets damaged accidentally within 12 months, after a 30-day waiting period.

Otterbox Defender

£25 from Amazon
www.snipca.com/19700

This rugged case consists of a silicon bumper, a hard case and a screen protector. The exact design varies – users report the iPhone 6 version doesn't sit as flush to the screen as others. It's great value if you want protection from drops and scratches but don't need waterproofing.

Thule Atmos X5

£60 from Amazon
www.snipca.com/19699

This water, dust and shockproof case for the iPhone 6/6s and 6/6s Plus snaps together to fully enclose your phone, with flaps for the charging and headphone ports. Using the touchscreen through the flexible plastic front can feel imprecise, although it works, and the speaker sounds quite buzzy.

Lifeproof Nüüd

£62 from Amazon
www.snipca.com/19702

If you like waterproofing but hate screen protectors, the Nüüd does the job with a rugged rear case that seals around the bare screen. Available for various iPhones and the iPad Air 2. Discounts vary widely, so shop around. If you prefer your screen protected too, look at Lifeproof's Fre instead.

PHONE | **£470** from John Lewis www.snipca.com/19650

Microsoft Lumia 950 XL

The biggest Windows 10 phone

We first tested the mobile version of Windows 10 in Microsoft's Lumia 950 (see Issue 466). Frankly, we weren't impressed. Running the same software on your phone as your PC is a nice idea, but even apps/programs designed to work this way – known as 'Universal' – still feel like separate versions. And most apps aren't universal yet, so your choices are limited compared with the thousands made for Apple and Android.

Even so, the new Windows 10 Mobile operating system is definitely better than its predecessor, so we were keen to try the 950 XL. Again, it's a simple, plastic black or white slab that feels well made. A microSD card slot lets you add to the 32GB of built-in storage, and you have the option of replacing the battery yourself, should it develop a fault or should you want to carry a spare that you can insert when it runs down.

A single charge lasted us comfortably through a day, though. Some modern devices don't come with chargers because the manufacturers assume you'll already have a USB mains adapter, but this one does, and the phone also works with wireless charging stations.

The obvious difference in this phone from the previous Lumia 950 is the bigger screen. Again, it's AMOLED, meaning colours look great but not super-bright. It's very sharp, and with high contrast and 99.4 per cent of the sRGB colour range, you'll find little to complain about here. It has a more powerful processor, which seems to fix the occasional judders we experienced before. The camera remains excellent.

A year's Microsoft Office 365 Personal subscription is included (worth about £60). This lets you use the Office apps on one tablet and one PC/Mac as well as the phone. The Home subscription, covering five of each type of device, would have been more attractive to people running Windows 10. Microsoft quotes £110 more for the 950 XL, but shopping around we found only £70 between the two models. That makes the 950 XL the better buy.

SPECIFICATIONS

5.7in 2560x1440-pixel screen • 32GB flash storage • 20-megapixel rear camera • 5-megapixel front camera • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.1 • 3G/4G • MicroSD card slot • USB Type-C port • Windows 10 Mobile • 152x79x8.1mm (HxWxD) • 165g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19644

VERDICT: If you're going to buy a Windows 10 phone, this is the best at the moment, but Apple and Android still have more to offer and we're not convinced Microsoft can compete

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: LG G4 £379 This 5.5in Android phone has a slower processor and average camera, but matches the microSD slot and removable battery at a much lower price

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

Should I buy a Skylake computer?

Q I'm choosing a new PC for general work and video-editing, on a budget of £500-£700. If I bought a PC with a Skylake processor, would I need to update any software? Also, would my Canon MG4250 printer and Dell UltraSharp U2412M monitor still work?

N Williamson

A Intel updates its range of processors every year, alternating between major and minor tweaks. With Skylake, not much has changed from the previous Broadwell series. Either way, new processors – whether from Intel or its rival, AMD – don't usually affect software and hardware compatibility, because they continue the 'x86' architecture that all PCs are based on.

But Skylake has one important limitation: it's not fully compatible with Windows 7. If you were running that version, you'd need to upgrade some programs to work on your new Skylake PC, which is likely to come with Windows 10, and check that an updated driver is available for your printer (as it happens, it is: visit www.snipca.com/19645).

Chillblast's Fusion Orion (www.snipca.com/19427, pictured) uses Skylake processors. Customised with an i5-6400 processor, 16GB of memory, fast 802.11ac Wi-Fi and a 2GB hard drive, it costs just under £600.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

PRINTER | **£70** from Tesco www.snipca.com/19616

Canon Pixma MG5750

A printer for all purposes

Imagine you could pick any item from your desk, get in a time machine and take it to the studio of Leonardo da Vinci. Which gadget would most impress the Renaissance's greatest inventor?

Your smartphone would intrigue him, but with no reception, you'd struggle to demonstrate the device's full potential. And when he asked how it worked, you'd be left babbling about a little black slab that could do billions of sums every second. (though he'd have to take your word for it).

> "Photos looked sharp and even, text and graphics were bold and crisp, and scans matched originals"

No, if there's one piece of everyday technology that would earn the respect of our engineering ancestors, it would be the inkjet printer. Open the lid and you can see the intricate gearing that moves the print head in hundredths of an inch; the grippers and rollers that feed the paper just as precisely; the needle-fine nozzles that squirt tiny drops of ink in exactly the right pattern, like the young Leonardo and his fellow painters completing a canvas for their master.

Like artists, though, inkjet printers can be temperamental. Take any two models with almost identical specifications. Plug them in, and you find one's delivered 10 perfect photos while you're still wrestling

with the paper tray on the other. So when we rate the latest printers, we're not just counting features: we're looking for something we'd actually want to use, time after time.

Canon's Pixma MG5750, which is compatible with Windows 10, is a fine example. Like many rivals, it comes with a scanning glass under the top lid, so you can make copies on paper or send image files to your PC. It connects with a USB cable or over Wi-Fi, and works with Apple or Android phones and tablets. You can also print from the internet using Google Cloud Print or Canon's own Pixma Cloud Link service, which also lets you store scans online. The only important feature it lacks was an SD card slot to print from or scan to a memory card. But if your camera supports the WLAN PictBridge system, you can print photos from it wirelessly.

The MG5750's small colour screen doesn't respond to touch, and picking options is more fiddly using buttons. It's still pretty straightforward, though. The control panel lifts up to let you install ink cartridges, with a lamp indicating each colour that needs replacing. The slots are clearly marked, but there's nothing to physically prevent you inserting a cartridge in the wrong slot.

Canon's five-cartridge system gives you four dye-based inks for photo printing, plus a pigment-based black ink for text. It's a great way to get the best of both worlds, and the quality from the MG5750 was as good as anything we've seen in this price bracket. Photos looked sharp and even, while text and graphics were bold and crisp. Photocopies matched originals, and scans showed good colour accuracy.

Text pages printed at a rate of 11.5 pages per minute (ppm), not bad for an inkjet; complex colour graphics still reached an acceptable 3.6ppm. An A4 page scanned in just 19 seconds at a typical 300 dots per inch (dpi), although increasing the resolution to 1200dpi meant even a postcard-sized scan took 103 seconds. This is common with multi-function devices. Using XL cartridges, which are better value, the cost of printing a standard colour page works out at a reasonable 6.3p.

The MG5750's very compact format relies on a pull-out paper tray with a pivoting output stop, which worked fine for us. Although there are no extras like automatic paper feed or CD labelling, it can print both sides of the paper (duplex). In short, this is a no-frills machine that handles all the essentials very well indeed.

SPECIFICATIONS

4800x1200dpi maximum print resolution • 1200x2400dpi maximum scan resolution • 100-sheet paper tray • USB 2.0 • 802.11n Wi-Fi • 148x455x369mm (HxWxD) • 6.3kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/19634

VERDICT: The Pixma MG5750 isn't exceptional in any way, but for getting everything important right at a fair price, it's highly recommended

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Brother MFC-J5320DW £81 With automatic paper feed and the ability to print occasional A3, this printer suits more business-based tasks

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE | **£79** from www.snipca.com/18693

Adobe Premiere Elements 14

Professional video editing for amateurs

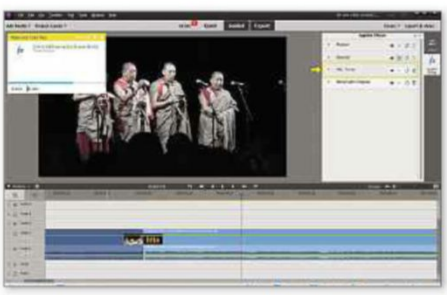
Shooting video is easy. The tricky part is turning the results into something worth watching, rather than clips that stop and start at random, or full-length events complete with all the boring bits. Affordable editing programs are now available, and many ordinary PCs are powerful enough to run them. But what you *really* need is a program that tries to mimic professional software without alienating beginners.

> "It successfully mimics professional software but won't confuse beginners"

Adobe's Premiere Elements is one of the few that successfully pulls this trick off, and its latest version does it better than ever. Inspired by Premiere Pro, the top-end software that's widely used to edit films and TV programmes, it simplifies complicated tools to make them easier to use.

There are more than 30 Guided Edits that walk you through particular tasks step by step. For example, you can change a scene to black and white except for one object that appears in vivid colour. You'd normally need to master several advanced tools to achieve this. What's especially good about the Elements approach is that you can tweak the end result – you're not stuck with a one-click filter.

Motion Titles – another new feature – come with preset animations that save you having to fiddle about with keyframes. We weren't as convinced by the results using this feature – some of the designs worked well with the sample text but looked messy when we inserted our own text. Magix Movie Edit Pro 2016 (see our review, Issue 464) does a better job of this.



A very useful new filter does a great job of removing camera shake (assuming it's not too extreme), so handheld shots no longer look jittery. It's also easier to mask off unwanted background subjects, to adjust them separately or remove them entirely from backgrounds. This gets you into the level of work that will require more advanced skill, but it's good to know that these features are included should you need them.

Saving video files for playback can usually be problematic, with lots of technical settings to get wrong. Premiere Elements 14 improves the process considerably, with simple options for the more common purposes.

You can now edit and export video at 4K resolution (four times sharper than Full HD) if your camera supports it, but you'll need a PC with an Intel Core i7 processor to cope with this. For most people, it'll make more sense to convert 4K footage to Full HD (1080p) files – which you can do using Premiere Elements 14 – and then work on those, because you're unlikely to watch them at more than 1080p anyway.

Like Photoshop Elements for pictures, Premiere Elements also helps you keep your video files organised. It can recognise faces within footage, and sort clips by date order and by place, if you took them with a device that records GPS information such as a smartphone.

Premiere Elements 14 is an excellent choice for anyone who wants to learn video editing without being either too confused or too restricted. If you have a previous version, the upgrade price gives you a grand total of £14 off, which is pretty modest, but buying from scratch represents great value.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Windows 7, 8 or 10 or OS X 10.9 or later • 2GB memory • Intel Core i7 processor for XAVC S video format • 10–15GB hard-drive space • Internet connection for activation www.snipca.com/19585

VERDICT: You could find a simpler program or a more comprehensive one, but Premiere Elements strikes an excellent balance for practical video editing

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE: Corel VideoStudio Ultimate X8.5 £80 This has more bells and whistles, but feels like several products thrown together and therefore doesn't work as smoothly

PC | **£4** from Element 14 www.snipca.com/19647

Raspberry Pi Zero

A PC for the price of a pint

Four years ago, a British charity called the Raspberry Pi Foundation launched a computer for £30. That didn't include a screen, software or even a case: it was just a bare circuit board. But it worked much the same way as any PC in the shops, and meant anyone wanting to experiment with writing programs or building gadgets could do so at a very low cost. It soon became popular with schools and hobbyists.

Since then, components have got cheaper and Raspberry Pi's engineers cleverer, and this latest model appeared at a price of just £4. Not surprisingly, it sold out immediately. As we write, the Pi Zero is still out of stock, and paying over the odds for a used one seems silly when the more powerful Raspberry Pi 2 costs under £25. More should be available soon.

> "It's no general-purpose PC, but tech tinkerers will love it"

The main attraction of the Pi Zero is that it's even smaller than the original and uses less power, lending itself to less demanding PC projects. Although some of the connections previously built in have been stripped away, such as those for a camera and sound, there's a Mini HDMI socket for a monitor and a microUSB 'On-The-Go' port to which you can connect a keyboard, mouse and other accessories with adapters.

To start the machine, you'll also need operating system software pre-loaded on a microSD card. Instead of Windows, Raspberry Pis run Linux, and the best version for the Zero is the specially adapted Raspbian. With its modest processor (the same one you'll find in the very first Pi) this model performs faster than a Raspberry Pi Model A+ or B+, but much slower than a Raspberry Pi 2. Aside from your microSD card, there's no built-in storage for programs or files.

What can you do with your Pi Zero? Without some specialist knowledge and probably a soldering iron, very little. This isn't a cheap way to buy a general-purpose PC. But if you're interested in tinkering, a huge enthusiast community can help you turn a Pi into anything from an internet-connected robot to a retro games console. Visit www.snipca.com/19652 for some ideas.

SPECIFICATIONS

1GHz Broadcom BCM2835 processor • 512MB memory • MicroUSB power connector • USB OTG port • Mini HDMI port (1080p Full HD and audio) • MicroSD card slot • 5x65x30mm (HxWxD) www.snipca.com/19649

VERDICT: It's not for everyone, but the Pi Zero shows just how cheap computers can get, and it's a great way to learn about electronics

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Raspberry Pi 2 £24

This bigger model has a more powerful processor and extra ready-made connections, so it might be better as a first buy

COMING SOON

SPRING 2016

A tablet that runs the Linux distribution Ubuntu is on the way. The 10.1in BQ Aquaris M10 Ubuntu Edition will work either as a conventional tablet or with a monitor, keyboard and mouse. It's 8.2mm thick and weighs 470 grams.

SPRING 2016

Lenovo's Link is a USB stick that connects an Android device to a PC, so you can operate mobile apps from your keyboard or show the device's screen in a window. At under £40, it's comparable with Microsoft's Display Dock, which lets you use a Windows 10 phone as a PC.

SUMMER 2016

Zotac reckons it invented the 'mini PC'. Among the new range it plans to launch in the summer is an upgrade for the C series that squeezes Intel's latest 'Skylake' Core i5 processor into a box the size of a large sandwich.

SUMMER 2016

Independent manufacturer OnePlus has shown it can do better than the big brands with its low-cost, high-spec phones, and soon we'll see another, possibly called the OnePlus 3. Expect a top-end Snapdragon processor and another affordable price tag.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 16 Mar

Honor 5X
A big phone at a small price

HP Envy 13
High-end Windows 10 laptop at a mid-range price

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£15 from **www.snipca.com/19124**

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Asus UX305

£580 from www.snipca.com/19439
Tested: Issue 447

13.3in is a practical size for a laptop, and this light but sturdy 'ultrabook' has a smart and slim design that does justice to its capable performance. Upgradeable to Windows 10, it's limited mainly by its 128GB SSD, which makes it work fast but might leave you needing more space.

ALTERNATIVE Toshiba Satellite C40-C This 14in Windows 10 laptop looks like it cost a lot more. It's not the most amazing PC, but it's fantastic for the price. £200 from www.snipca.com/19436

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Shockwave

£500 from www.snipca.com/18748
Tested: Issue 464

Proving that you don't need an Intel processor, Palicomp has built an excellent PC around AMD's Athlon X4 860K and Radeon R7 370 graphics card. Runs Windows 7, 8.1 or 10.

ALTERNATIVE: Chillblast Fusion Orion i3 As long as games aren't a priority, this almost invisibly plain black box has all you need in an all-round budget system. £380 from www.snipca.com/19427

TABLET

Apple iPad Mini 4

£319 from www.snipca.com/18100
Tested: Issue 460

The 2015 update to Apple's 7.9in tablet greatly improves the screen and camera, boosts performance, and makes it worth the £100 extra over the iPad mini 2 (still a good budget buy). Go for the £399 64GB version if you can, though.

ALTERNATIVE: Apple iPad Air 2 The 9.7in option is still slim and light, also has Touch ID and Apple Pay, and the range of apps beats Android. £399 from www.snipca.com/18139

PHONE

Apple iPhone 6s

£539 from www.snipca.com/18240
Tested: Issue 461

It may look like the 2014 model, but this update is stronger and faster, with a higher-resolution camera, time-saving 3D Touch features and an excellent screen. The bigger 6s Plus has better battery life.

ALTERNATIVE: Moto X Play Motorola's fun phone may be plasticky, but it runs Android 5 smoothly. The screen, camera and battery life are all big pluses. £260 from www.snipca.com/17934

DIGITAL CAMERA

Panasonic Lumix FZ330

£449 from www.snipca.com/19441
Tested: Issue 462

A wide-angle lens to capture scenes, a longer fast lens for flattering portraits and a telephoto for distant subjects – the 12-megapixel FZ330 gives you them all in one unit, with a fixed high-quality zoom lens.

ALTERNATIVE: Sony A5000 This neat compact system camera (CSC) lets you choose different lenses from Sony's range for more creative possibilities. £249 from www.snipca.com/15854

E-READER

PRICE DROP

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite

£90 from www.snipca.com/17776
Tested: Issue 458

With a new high-resolution screen, the affordable Kindle lacks only automatic brightness adjustment and page-turn buttons (you have to swipe the screen). It's great value as long as you're happy to buy your books from Amazon.

ALTERNATIVE: Kobo Glo HD As good as the Paperwhite, but with more storage, and slightly more compact, this is the independent e-reader to pick. £90 from www.snipca.com/19158

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SECURITY SOFTWARE

Kaspersky Internet Security 2016

£19.99 from www.snipca.com/17874
Tested: Issue 437

Kaspersky Internet Security 2016 has won our past seven antivirus tests. Compatible with Windows 10, the 2016 edition is available at an exclusive reader discount on our Software Store. Go to the link above for a one-device licence, or buy a three-device licence for just £39.99 at www.snipca.com/17903.

ALTERNATIVE: Avast Free Antivirus Almost as good as Kaspersky, but sometimes blocked legitimate software. Free from www.snipca.com/16493

PHOTO EDITING

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 6

£104 from www.snipca.com/16952
Tested: Issue 453

Lightroom is the professional's choice for managing and tweaking photos, including raw files from DSLR cameras. If you need Photoshop for more advanced editing, get both on the Adobe CC Photography Plan for £8.57 a month (www.snipca.com/19283).

ALTERNATIVE: Xara Photo & Graphic Designer 11 For all-round design and drawing plus photo filters, this affordable app has a lot to offer. £50 from www.snipca.com/19280

SMART TV

Samsung UE40H5500

£398 from www.snipca.com/19160
Tested: Issue 446

A 40in smart TV with great picture quality and apps for all the terrestrial TV catch-up services. It has plenty of extras too, such as recording to USB storage, playing media files stored on a NAS or USB stick and plenty of HDMI ports.

ALTERNATIVE: Sony KDL-43W755C Excellent image quality, stylish looks and a 43in screen. £429 from www.snipca.com/18153

PC MONITOR

AOC Q2778VQE

£215 from www.snipca.com/19416
Tested: Issue 468

It comes with no extras, such as built-in speakers or a USB hub, but this 2560x1440 panel gives you a full 27in screen with excellent contrast and colour accuracy at a very reasonable price. It's a little laggy for gamers, but there's no ghosting on motion.

ALTERNATIVE: Dell UltraSharp U2414H This 1920x1080, 24in screen has a stand that can switch to portrait mode. Colour accuracy is excellent. £188 from www.snipca.com/18207

ROUTER

Trendnet TEW-812DRU

£122 from www.snipca.com/19437
Tested: Issue 427

An incredibly fast 802.11ac router that's also one of the cheapest we've seen. It's superb and it's the router to buy if you're ready to make the jump to 802.11ac.

ALTERNATIVE: Linksys WRT1900AC More expensive, but even faster and with loads of features too. £180 from www.snipca.com/14950

NAS

Synology DiskStation DS215j

£132 from www.snipca.com/16187
Tested: Issue 449

This two-drive NAS enclosure has it all – fast performance, easy configuration and plenty of extra features. Its only flaw is that installation is a little fiddly – but if you want quality network storage, then this is the obvious choice.

ALTERNATIVE: Synology DS414j A four-drive NAS that's generally fast, easy to set up and use. £242 from www.snipca.com/16707

HOMEPLUGS

Devolo dLAN 1200 Triple+ Starter Kit

£119 from www.snipca.com/15369
Tested: Issue 444

Devolo's latest HomePlug adapters are the fastest we've ever seen. They're well designed too, with a passthrough socket so you can still power another device and the design should avoid skirting boards and other obstacles.

ALTERNATIVE: D-Link PowerLine AV2 1000HD Gigabit Starter Kit Fast (speeds of up to 1000Mbps), much cheaper and very easy to set up, but the lack of a passthrough socket is frustrating. £45 from www.snipca.com/17836

WEB-DESIGN

PRICE DROP

Xara Web Designer Premium 11

£60 from www.snipca.com/16955
Tested: Issue 453

This visual web-design program makes creating sites more like laying out a document than writing HTML code, and sites can be responsive, meaning they look right on both big and small screens without extra work. A basic version is also available for half the price.

ALTERNATIVE: Incomedia WebSite X5 v12 Evolution It may feel a little basic, but this straightforward program outputs efficient HTML code and responsive pages. £38 from www.snipca.com/19440

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 5 **ShieldX2 cases for the iPhone 6**

Built from shock-absorbing material, ShieldX2's protective cases will keep your iPhone safe from harm. The case is transparent, thin and sleek, so it barely looks like it's on your phone at all. Its 9H tempered glass keeps your screen safe, and even enhances its brightness. ShieldX2 promises to replace your phone if it gets damaged while the case is attached. To enter, email your address to **cacomp@dennis.co.uk** with 'shieldx2' in the subject line by midnight 15 March.

ShieldX2 make protective cases for the iPhone, as well as HTC, Sony and Samsung Android phones. For more information visit http://shieldx2.co.uk and watch the videos on ShieldX2's YouTube channel: www.snipca.com/19601.

MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER

NEW ENTRY

Canon Pixma MG5750

£70 from www.snipca.com/19616
Tested: Issue 470

You don't get many frills, but this compact all-in-one printer/scanner includes all the essentials, like Wi-Fi and printing both sides of the paper (duplex), at a reasonable price. It's fairly quick, running costs are better than average, and the five-ink system ensures photos and black text both come out looking great.

ALTERNATIVE: Brother MFC-J5320DW For more business-type tasks, this all-in-one has automatic paper feed for the scanner and the ability to print occasional A3 pages. £80 from www.snipca.com/19674

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Crucial BX100 1TB

£267 from www.snipca.com/19572
Tested: Issue 445

A blindingly fast, high-capacity SSD at a lower price than ever before. If you've been put off buying a SSD because of the cost, then now is finally the time to take the plunge.

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung 850 Pro 256GB An even faster SSD, but it's much more expensive per gigabyte. £135 from www.snipca.com/16498

SECURITY CAMERA

Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

£135 from www.snipca.com/11646
Tested: Issue 420

A home-security camera that's well priced and easy to set up. Plus, it has great picture quality, useful apps and there's no need to subscribe to any extra services. It's a worthy successor to the original HomeMonitor, our previous favourite security camera.

ALTERNATIVE: D-Link Wireless N Day & Night Camera A good-value security camera with excellent night vision. £88 from www.snipca.com/15275

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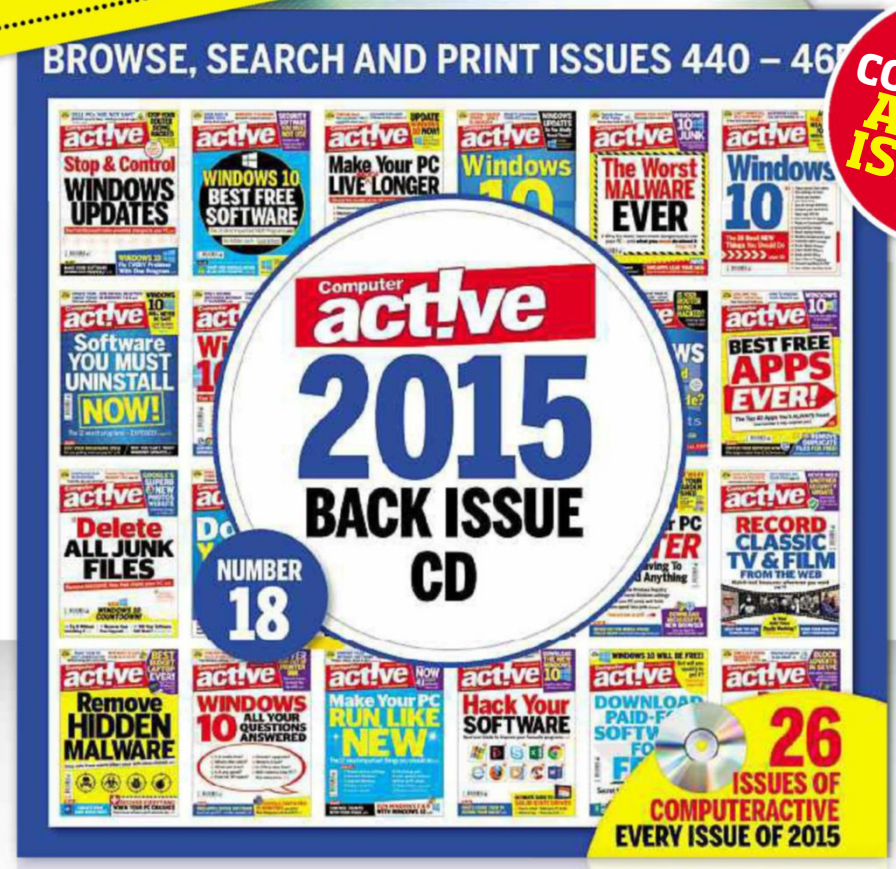

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Workshops & Tips

PULL OUT & KEEP Issue 470

Edited by Sherwin Coelho

14 pages of easy-to-follow workshops and expert tips

35 Add Windows 7 tools to 10
38 Discover what's slowing your PC
40 Always avoid fake download buttons
42 Send text messages from your PC

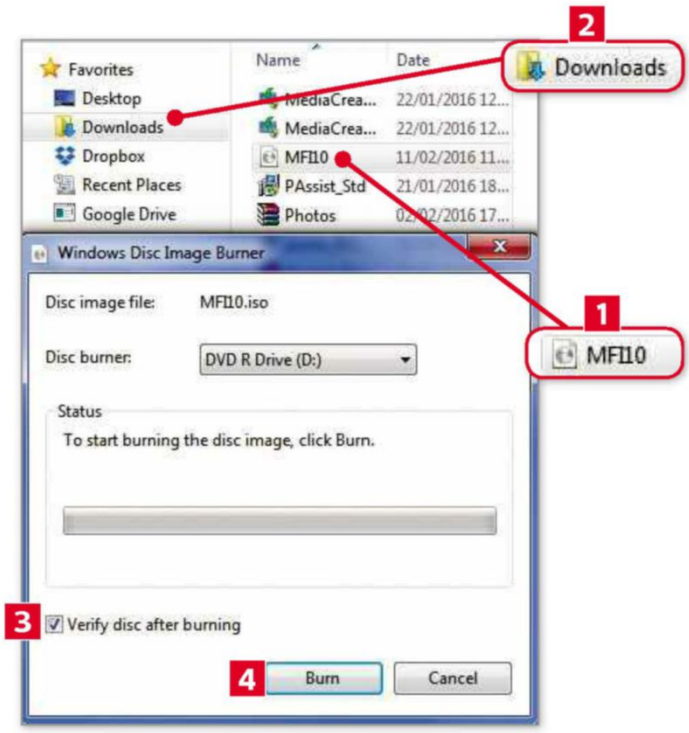
PLUS
43 Readers' Tips
44 Phone & Tablet Tips
46 Make Windows Better
47 Make Office Better
48 Secret Tips For... Windows 10 gestures

Add Windows 7 tools to 10

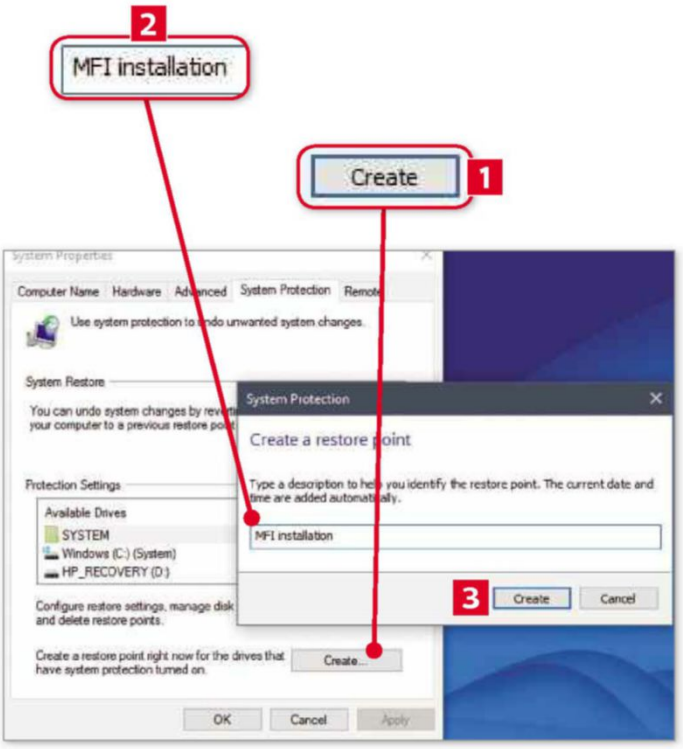
What you need: Missing Features Installer 10; blank DVD; Windows 10
Time required: 50 minutes

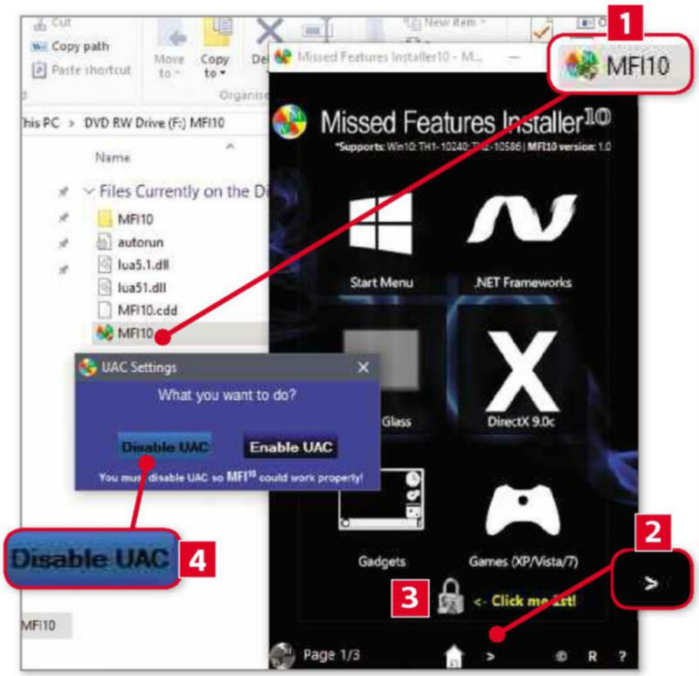
While Microsoft introduced many new features to Windows 10, it also removed some tools that Windows 7 users loved. You can add these to Windows 10 using Missing Features Installer, an ISO file that contains many free third-party programs (including Classic Shell and Aero Glass). We'll show you how to use it to restore the Windows 7-style Start menu, all your favourite Windows 7 games, Aero Glass effects, Windows Experience Index and Windows Movie Maker.

STEP 1 To install Missed Features Installer (MFI), go to www.snipca.com/19641, click the Download button, then click 'Download anyway'. Because it's an ISO file you first need to burn the downloaded file to a DVD. You can use your own disc-burning software to do this. Alternatively, insert a blank DVD into your PC, then launch the downloaded ISO file 1 (in your Downloads folder 2) to bring up your Windows Disc Image Burner. Next, tick 'Verify disc after burning' 3, then click Burn 4.

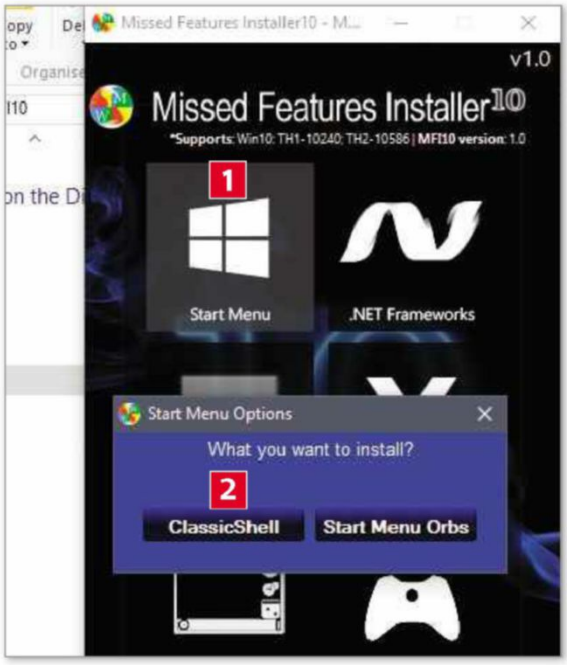


STEP 2 It's a good idea to create a system restore point before using MFI. This will give you the option to roll back any system changes later if required. To do that, press the Windows key, type create a restore point, then click that option. In the System Properties windows, click Create 1, name your restore point 2, click Create again 3, then click Close.

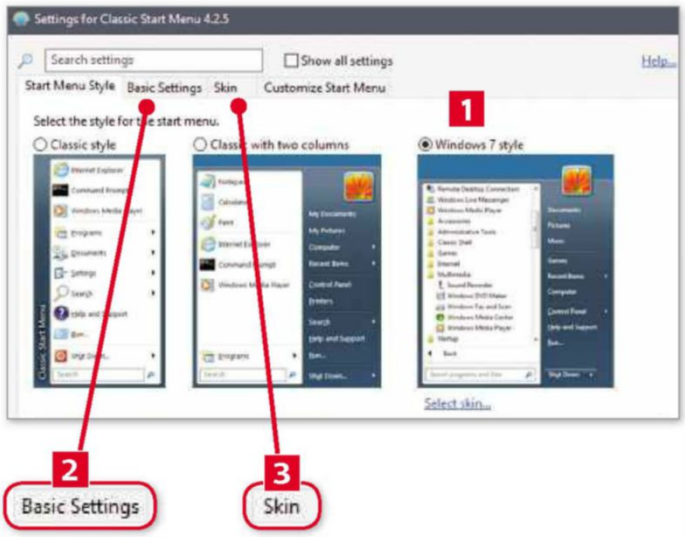




STEP 3 Now close any running programs to your PC. Next, click File Explorer on your Taskbar, click your DVD drive, then the MFI 10 setup file 1. Tick 'I accept the terms of this License', then click OK. You'll now see tiles containing six Windows 7 features. Click the right-pointing arrow 2 to see more features. Before installing any programs, click the lock icon 3, then click Disable UAC 4. Your Command Prompt will open with a message to press any key to restart your PC.

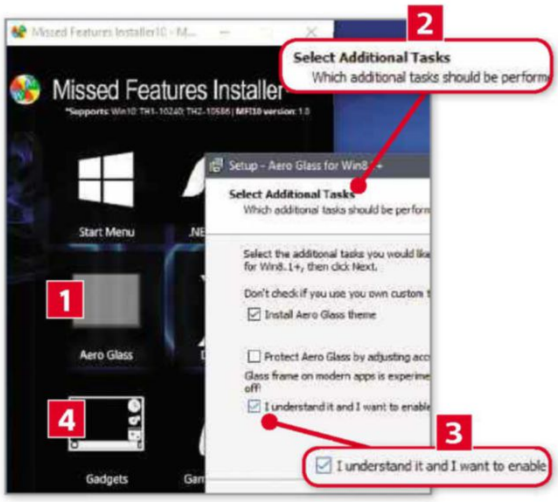


STEP 4 After restarting, open the MFI 10 setup file again. First we'll show you how to install a Windows 7-style Start menu. Click Start Menu 1 to see two third-party programs - ClassicShell and Start Menu Orbs. We recommend the former, so click Classic Shell 2, progress through the setup screens, then click Finish. Classic Shell has many customisation options, so right-click the Start button on your PC, then click Settings.



STEP 5 Select the style of Start menu you want 1. Next, click the Basic Settings tab 2. From here you can configure specific mouse-click and keyboard actions to launch the Classic Shell Start menu or the Windows 10 (live tile) Start menu. For example, you can set the Windows 10 Start menu to launch whenever you right-click the Start button and set the Classic Start Menu to launch whenever you press the Windows key on your keyboard. Now click the Skin tab 3 and select Windows Aero from the dropdown at the top (this most closely resembles the Windows 7 Start menu). Finally, click OK.

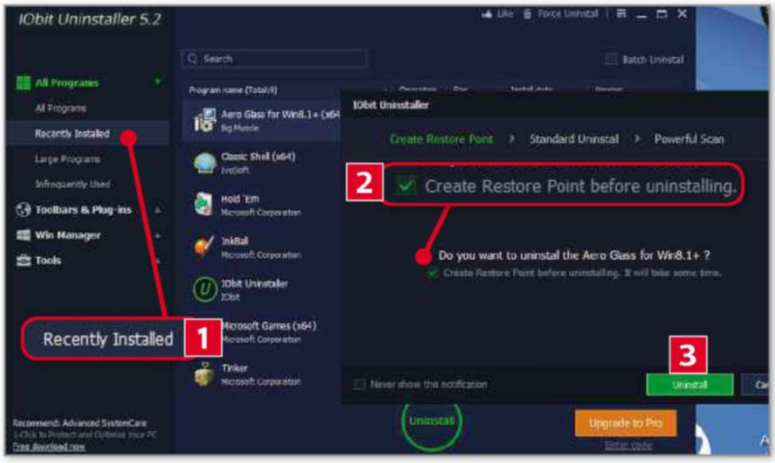
STEP 6 We'll now show you how to install Windows 7 games. Go back to the MFI screen and click Games 1. Your Command Prompt will open and the games will start installing automatically. Close the Command Prompt window when you see the Done message. Now open your Start menu, click 'All Programs', then click the Games folder 2 to see all your Windows 7 games 3. Click one to start playing. Alternatively, launch Games Explorer 4 on your Desktop to see a list of titles.



STEP 7 To install Windows 7's Aero Glass effect (for a translucent look to the interface), click Aero Glass 1 and follow the setup steps until you reach the Select Additional Tasks screen 2. Tick the final box 3 if you want to add the effect to Windows 10 apps that support it. MFI can also install all your Windows 7 gadgets 4, but Microsoft says these are unsafe (read more at www.snipca.com/18406).
If you still want to use gadgets on your Windows 10 PC, refer to 'Use Windows Desktop gadgets safely' Workshop in Issue 462 (page 40).

STEP 8 The Windows Experience Index (WEI) is a useful Windows 7 tool that analyses and rates all the components of your PC (including processor, RAM and graphics card) on a scale of 1 to 9.9. Windows 10 doesn't have this tool but you can install it by opening MSI, clicking the arrow at the bottom of the screen twice, clicking Windows Experience Index Tool 1, then following the instructions to install it. Click Finish to see your WEI score 2. In future, you can launch this tool via its Desktop shortcut 3.

STEP 9 To install Windows Movie Maker, click Windows Movie Maker 6.0 1. Your Command Prompt will start installing the program. When you see the Done message 2 you'll see the Windows Movie Maker and DVD Maker shortcuts 3 added to your Desktop. You can install Windows Mail from Windows 7 and the Calendar from Windows Vista 4 in the same way.

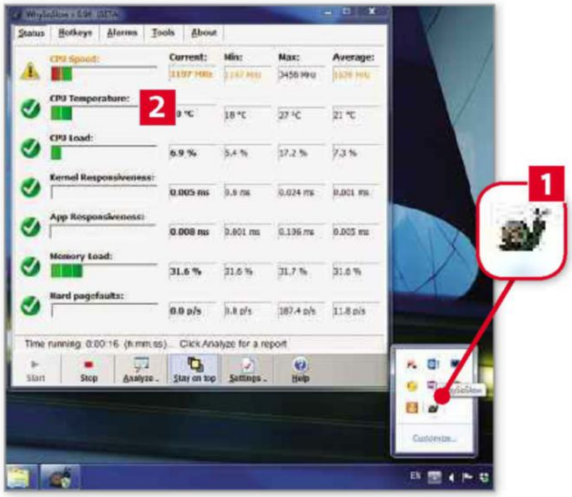


STEP 10 While you can remove any of the MSI programs using Windows' uninstaller, we recommend using IObit Uninstaller. This free program creates a restore point before uninstalling software and removes any leftover files. Install IObit Uninstaller from www.snipca.com/18668 (untick any third-party extras during installation). Now open the program and click Recently Installed 1 to see all the third-party programs that MSI installed. To uninstall a program, click the green bin icon beside it, tick the box below 2, then click Uninstall 3. You may need to restart your PC to completely remove any leftover files.

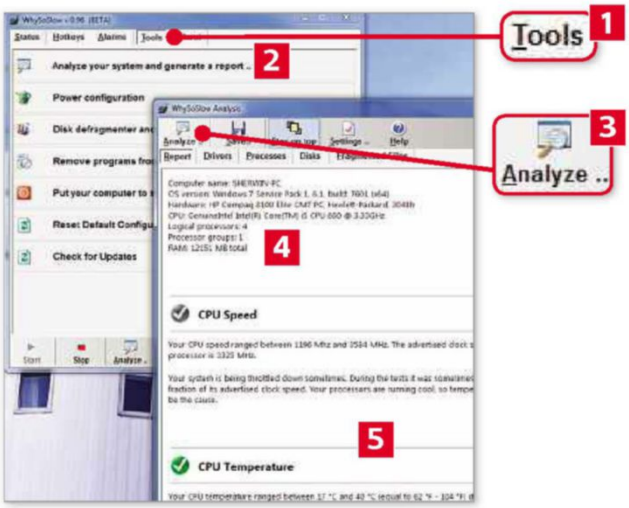
Discover what's slowing your PC

What you need: WhySoSlow; Windows 7, 8, 10 **Time required:** 20 minutes

It can be hard to pinpoint the exact reason for your PC slowing to a crawl. WhySoSlow is a free beta tool that gives you detailed information about your PC – including its performance, temperature and how quickly it carries out certain tasks (such as opening programs). It can analyse your PC and suggest likely culprits for your PC's slugglishness. While the program doesn't include fixes, it provides handy links to Windows tools that can address these problems and speed up your PC.

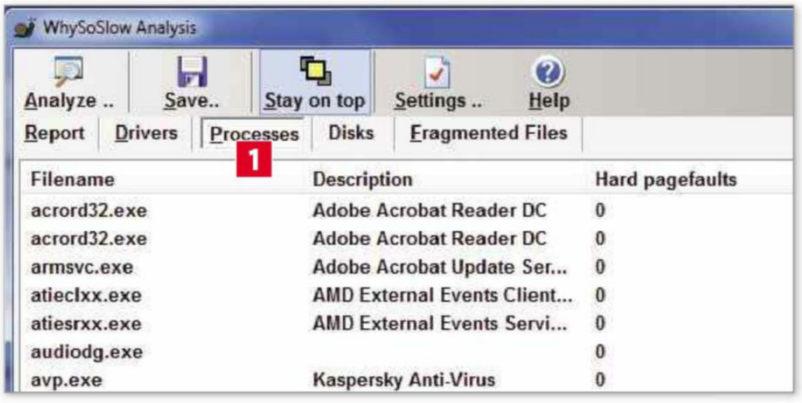


STEP 1 To download the program, go to www.snipca.com/19646, scroll to the Download section at the bottom, then click the setup file link. Next, click the downloaded setup file, Run, Yes, accept the T&Cs, click Next three times, then tick 'Create a desktop shortcut'. Click Next, Install, then Finish. If the program doesn't open automatically, check your Taskbar's hidden icons 1 to see whether it's running in the background. On its main screen, you'll see data showing your PC's performance in a number of key areas (including speed, temperature and responsiveness 2).

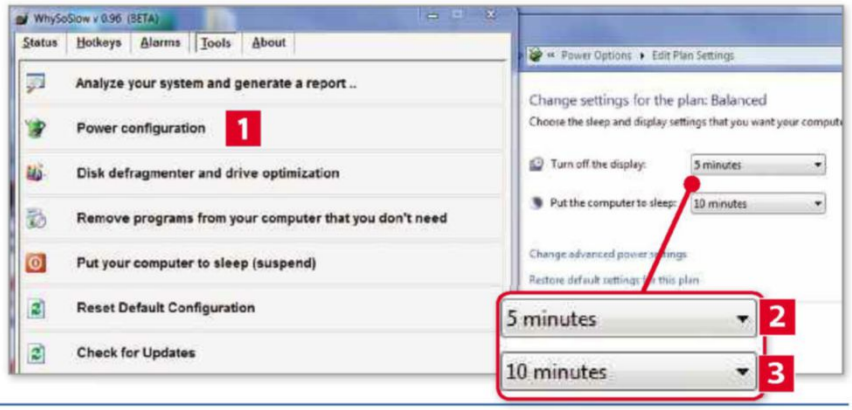


STEP 2 If some of these terms are unfamiliar you can generate a report that will give you info that's easier to understand. To do that, click Tools 1, 'Analyze your system and generate a report' 2, then click Analyze 3. At the top of your report you'll see important system information, including your operating system version, PC manufacturer, and details about processor(s) 4. Scroll down to see more detailed information 5. Unless you see red triangular warning signs beside a component, you don't need to take any immediate action.

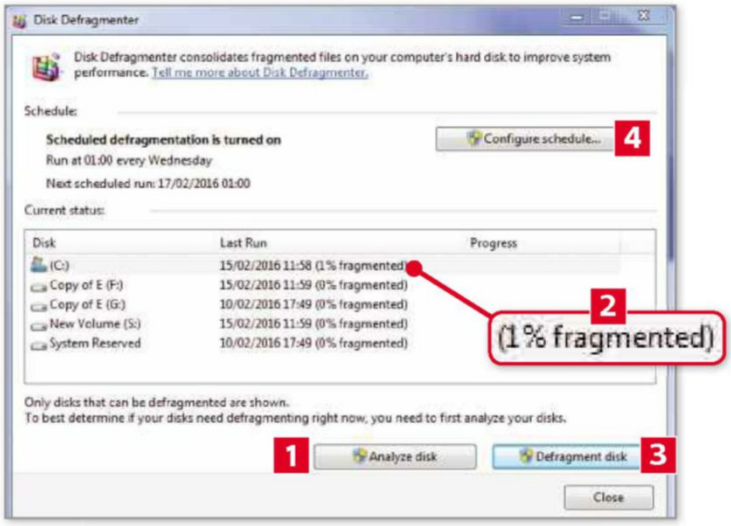
STEP 3 The tabs at the top of your report window list other PC components (including background processes, drivers and hard drives 1). WhySoSlow's findings can vary depending on when you analyse your PC. If your PC has been switched on for a few days, you may see numerous warnings. Whereas if you've carried out the tests shortly after a restart, you may see none at all. Regardless of your report findings, we'll now show you how to make your PC faster.

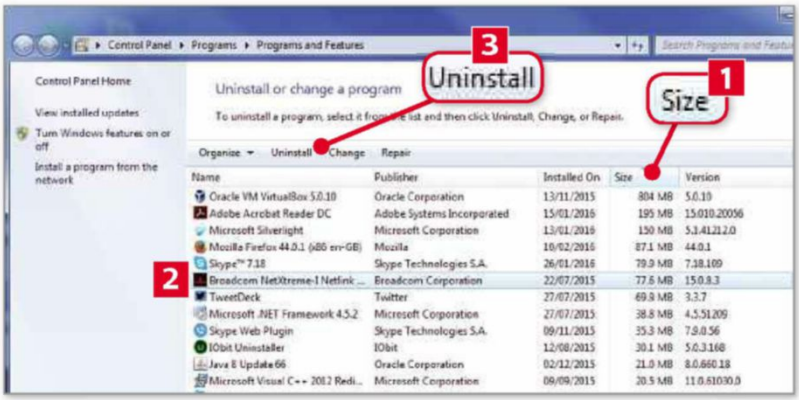


STEP 4 In WhySoSlow's main window, click the Tools tab, then 'Power configuration' 1 to open your PC's Power Options settings. Here, select Balanced, then click 'Choose when to turn off the display' on the left. You'll see two options – 'Turn off the display' and 'Put the computer to sleep'. Click each respective dropdown menu and select a time period (of inactivity) after which the tasks will be carried out. We recommend turning off the display after 5 minutes 2 and putting the PC to sleep after 10 minutes 3. Click 'Save changes' at the bottom.



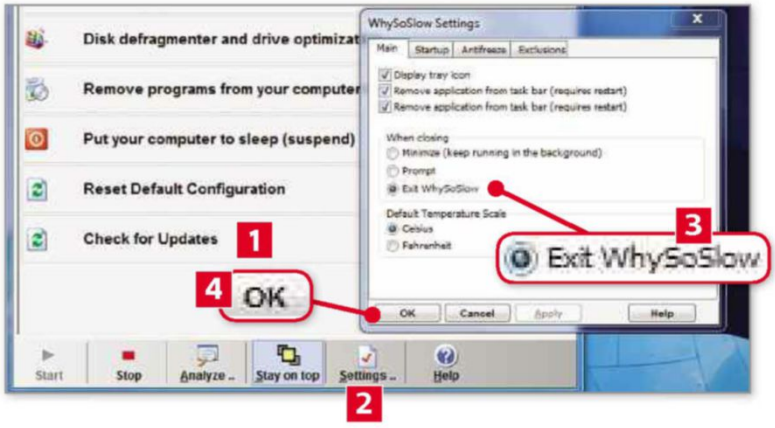
STEP 5 Now click 'Disk defragmenter and drive optimization' in WhySoSlow's Tools section to open your PC's Disk Defragmenter. Select your first drive, then click 'Analyse disk' 1. If – after the scan – you see that a percentage of the drive is fragmented 2, click 'Defragment disk' 3. You can also set your Disk Defragmenter to run automatically on a schedule. To do that, click 'Configure schedule' 4 and use the dropdown menus to set a frequency, date and time to perform the process. If your PC is less than three years old, we recommend running Disk Defragmenter monthly. If it's older than three years, set it to run weekly.



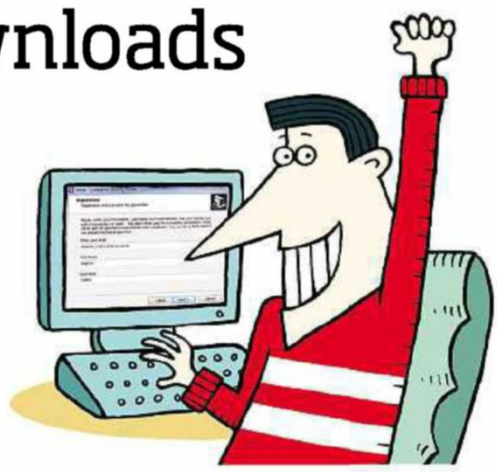


STEP 6 Next, click 'Remove programs from your computer that you don't need' within WhySoSlow. This opens your PC's 'Uninstall programs' section. Click the Size column header 1 to sort your programs by size and see which programs are taking up the most space. If you don't use any of these programs, click to select one 2, then click Uninstall 3 and follow the onscreen instructions. Alternatively, you can use a third-party program such as IObit Uninstaller (see Step 10 on page 37).

STEP 7 To provide feedback about the program, go to www.resplendence.com/support and fill in the form outlining any problems you had or any suggestions. Because the program is still in beta, it's constantly being tweaked and updated with features. Click 'Check for Updates' 1 to ensure you're using the latest version. When you close the program, it minimises to your Taskbar by default. To avoid this, click Settings 2, select Exit WhySoSlow 3, then click OK 4.



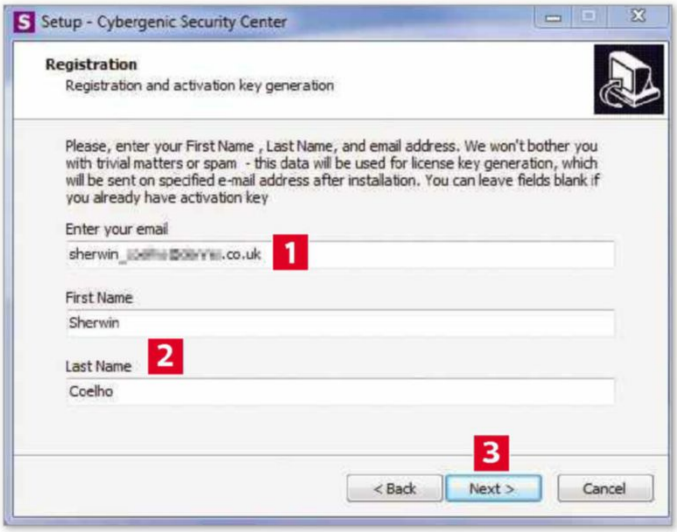
Always avoid fake downloads



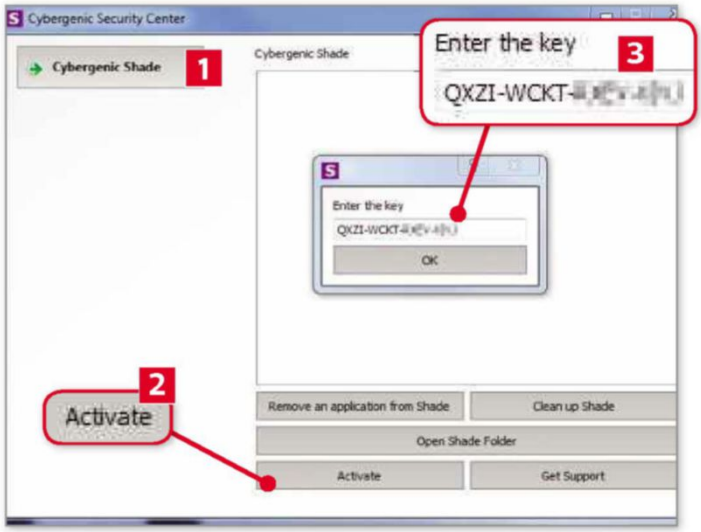
What you need: Shade; Windows Vista, 7, 8 and 10
Time required: 25 minutes

Some third-party download websites try to tempt users into clicking fake download buttons. Some of these are harmless – though still annoying – adverts. But others take you to malicious websites or leave your PC vulnerable to harmful files. Shade is a great free security program that isolates your browser activity within a secure virtual environment (sandbox). This prevents you downloading anything that might harm your PC because any file that arrives via your browser is directed to this sandbox, where you can check its legitimacy before installing or deleting it.

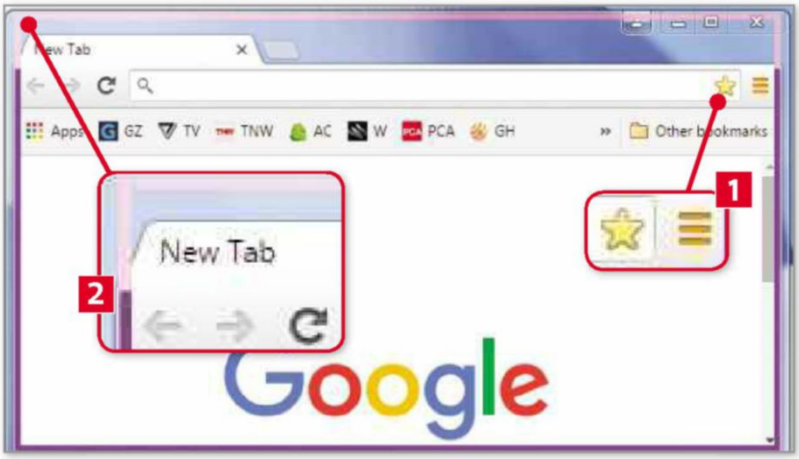
STEP 1 First, close all open programs on your PC. Now, go to www.shadesandbox.com and click the green Download button. Click the downloaded setup file, then Run, Yes, Next, accept the T&Cs and click Next again. Although the program is free, you need to activate it using a registration key, so type your email address 1, name and surname 2, then click Next 3 and OK to start installing it. Now select 'Yes, restart the computer now', then click Finish.



STEP 2 On restarting you'll see a notification (in your PC's notification area) saying your free version of Shade will expire in two days. You need to activate the program to continue using it for free beyond that point. To do that, open Shade by clicking its purple icon in your system tray. Next, click the Cybergenic Shade button 1, then click Activate 2. Now go to your email, copy the licence key from the email Shade sent you, then paste it into the Key field 3. Click OK. Upon activation, you'll see all your PC's browsers added to Shade's main window.

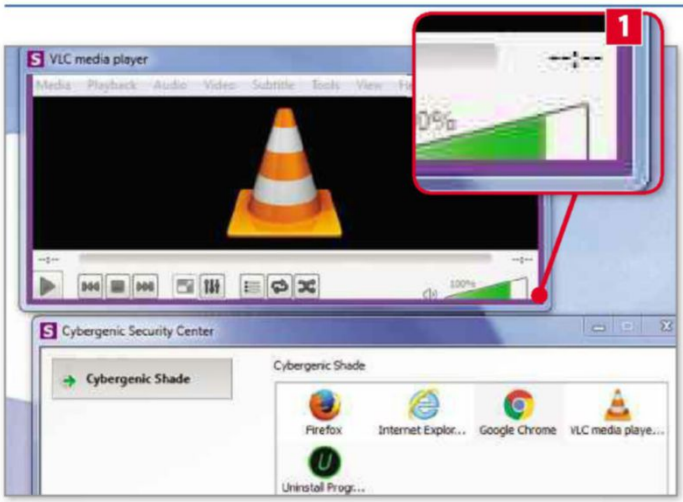


STEP 3 Now open one of your browsers. There are two ways to ensure it's running inside Shade's sandbox. First, you'll notice that your browser's add-ons have been disabled 1. Alternatively, move your cursor to any edge of the browser and you should see a purple border 2, which Shade has added. Shade doesn't store your browsing history and passwords, making it a secure way to surf the internet. It's also a safe way to click any links you're unsure of.



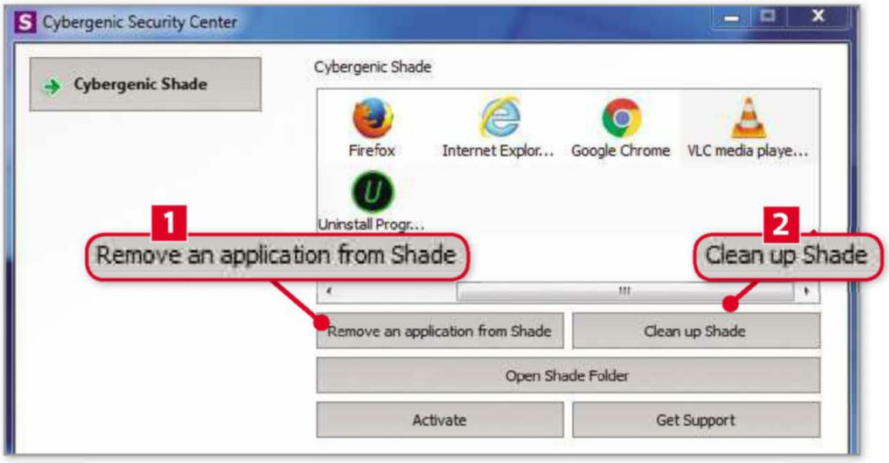
STEP 4 We'll now show you how Shade protects your PC from potentially harmful downloads. Go to any website and download a file as you normally would. You won't be able to access this file from your Downloads folder. Instead, you'll see a notification pop-up 1 telling you it has been downloaded to a virtual folder (Shade's sandbox). Don't click the notification because this will move the downloaded file to the Downloads folder on your PC. We'll show you how to check the file first, then move it to your Downloads folder once you've established it's legitimate.

STEP 5 Now go back to Shade, click Open Shade Folder 1, open the folder within that, click Users, [your name], then Downloads 2. Check that the name of the downloaded file matches the one you want. If it doesn't, click it and press Shift+Delete to permanently remove it from your PC. If it's the file you wanted, there's an easy way to move the file from Shade to your Downloads folder. Right-click the file, then click 'Restore file' (beside the purple S icon). You can now go to your Downloads folder and install the file as you normally would.



STEP 6 You can also use Shade to run programs and open links that you suspect might be malicious. Drag and drop the suspect program's Desktop icon into Shade. Now whenever you launch the program, it will open with a purple border 1 (indicating it's running within the Shade sandbox). Any changes the program makes won't affect your PC.

STEP 7 To remove a program from Shade, first ensure you close it on your PC. Now click to select the program's icon within Shade, then click 'Remove an application from Shade' 1. Similarly, to remove all the programs you've added to Shade, simply click 'Clean up Shade' 2. You'll see a message in your PC's notification area when you can to use these programs as normal. ●

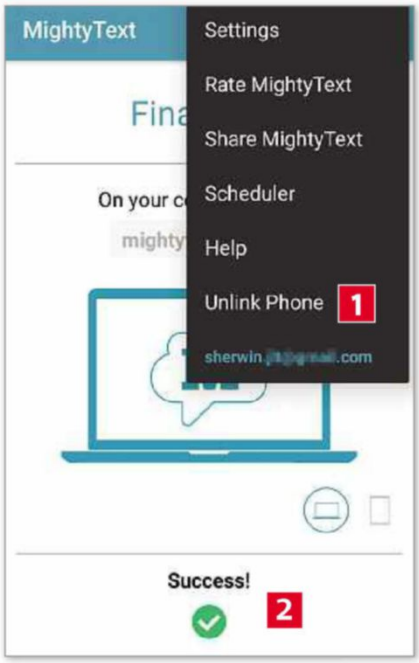


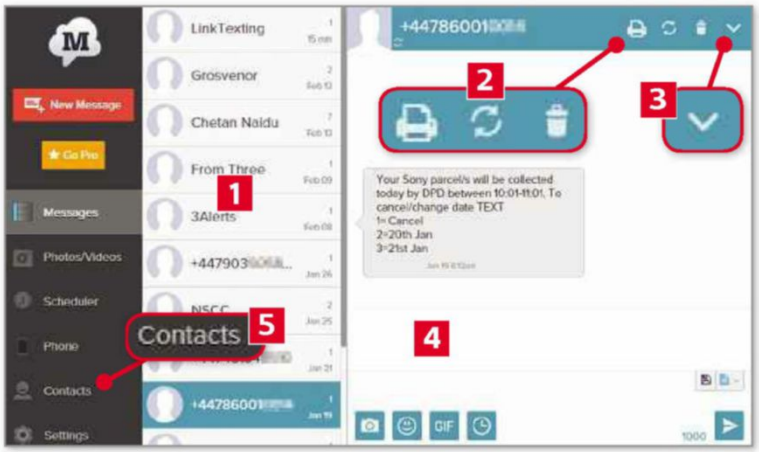
Send text messages from your PC

What you need: MightyText; Android phone **Time required:** 10 minutes

Using your phone's tiny keyboard to send text messages can be fiddly. A better way to send error-free text messages from your Android phone is to use the convenience of your PC's bigger screen and keyboard. MightyText is a great free app (Android only) that lets you sync your phone with your PC. Once you've paired the two, it's easy to send and receive text messages from your PC. Charges for these texts will – as with your phone – be subject to the terms of your phone contract.

STEP 1 First, install MightyText on your phone from the Google Play Store (www.snipca.com/19671), open it, tap OK, then Allow. Now select your Google account 1, tap Complete Setup 2, then Allow again. You'll now see a message on your phone's screen telling you to go to www.mightytext.net/app on your PC. Open any browser on your PC, go to the link, then click 'Yes, let's go!'. Click End Tour to skip the tutorial. You'll now see all your phone's text conversations listed in your browser.





STEP 2 Click a conversation 1 to read it. You can also print, refresh or delete it 2. Click the dropdown menu 3, then click 'Call from Phone' to do that. To reply to the message, type your reply in the field below 4, press Enter to send it, then click the refresh icon to ensure it's been sent. To send a text message to a contact that isn't listed, click Contacts 5, navigate to the person you want to text, click the SMS icon (it displays Send New Message when you hover over it), then type and send your message.

STEP 3 If you see a red pop-up error message warning that your message can't be sent, it's likely that the connection between your phone and PC has dropped out. To restore this, open the MightyText app on your phone, tap the three lines at the top right, Unlink Phone 1, select your Google account, then tap Complete Setup (see Step 1). Now return to your PC and refresh the MightyText web page in your browser. When the connection has been restored, you'll see a Success! message with a green tick on your phone 2.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 16 Mar

- Set new defaults for Windows 10
- Add Chrome-like tabs to Word docs
- Make your own keyboard shortcuts
- Set up a group Skype chat

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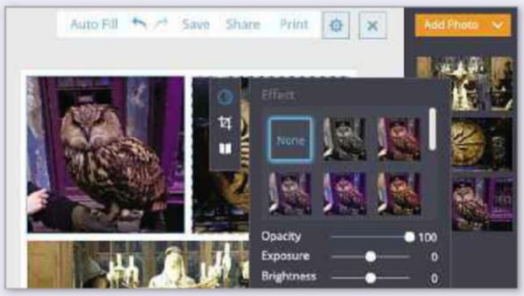
TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Create great collages without specialist software

Many moons ago I worked as a graphic designer and used Adobe Photoshop on a daily basis. While it does a great job of editing photos, I now no longer use it. The problem is that it's a huge program that often slows down my old PC, and there are so many great alternatives that do the same job for free. Take, for example, the website www.fotojet.com which I stumbled upon quite by chance. It lets you create brilliant photo collages in your browser.



Click Get Started below Classic Collage, then choose your collage template from the comprehensive list on the left-hand side. To add a photo from your PC, click Add Photo at the top right and select the ones you want. Next, drag and drop them into their respective positions on the template. Click any photo within the template to bring up a menu with options to add filters, edit properties, and crop, rotate and flip it.

When you've finished, click Save at the top, name the photo, select High Quality, set the size to Large, then click 'Save to Computer' to download it to your PC. On the whole, it took me less time to put collages together on this free website than on the fairly expensive Photoshop.

Charles Hinton

The winner of every Tip of the Fortnight wins this exclusive Computeractive mug!

STREAMING

Stream photos from your phone to your Sky+ box

Last week, my brother and sister-in-law came to visit and I wanted to show them photos of my grandson taken at Christmas. Because I have a Sky+ TV box, my brother told me I could 'stream' photos from my phone or tablet directly to my TV using the free Sky+ app. I thought this was only possible if you had a Chromecast.

First, ensure your TV is switched on (to any channel) and your device is connected to the same Wi-Fi network as your Sky+ TV box. Now install the free Sky+ app (Android www.snipca.com/19614; iOS www.snipca.com/19615), then open it, tap 'Sign in' and log into your Sky account. Next, tap the spanner icon at the top left, 'Connect to Sky+ HD box', select your Sky+ box, then tap Connect (you only need to do this once).

Tap the camera icon at the top of the app to see all the photos on your device. To select multiple photos, tap Select, tap the photos you want to stream, then tap 'View on TV' (see screenshot below left). Your screen will now display the first photo you selected. Swipe across your device to move between your photos. To disconnect, tap the yellow TV icon at the bottom right, then tap 'Remove from TV'.

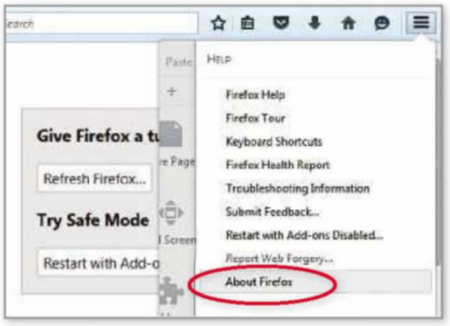
Caroline Brent

BROWSER

Speed up Firefox by restoring its original settings

Firefox is my favourite browser, but recently I noticed it had slowed to a crawl. It was taking ages to load new pages and then it would often crash while trying to do so. I was about to switch to a new browser when I came across a quick way of restoring Firefox to its original settings. Doing this removes any add-ons and themes you've previously added. It also wipes all your browsing history and any saved passwords.

First, you need to update Firefox to the latest version. Click the three lines at the top right, followed by the '?' icon at the bottom, then About Firefox (see screenshot above right). Next, type about:support into your browser bar and press Enter. You'll be taken to Firefox's Troubleshooting Information page. To restore your browser to its original settings, click Refresh Firefox at the top right. The browser will now relaunch.



Mine is now lightning fast again and hasn't crashed since.

Haydn James

CHROMEBOOK

Make quick calculations and measurement conversions

My son gave me a Chromebook for Christmas. Initially, I had reservations because it isn't Windows, but I love the way it boots in under five seconds and has all my favourite Google apps (though I still love my Windows desktop PC). Something I discovered just the other day is that you can make calculations and convert units in seconds.

Click the Chrome App Launcher (the nine dots at the bottom left), then type your calculation (for example, 87 x 54 + 13) to see the answer below. Similarly, this works if you type a measurement conversion (for example, 75 feet in inches). I find this much faster than carrying out the same calculations in Windows' Calculator.

Lucas Reynolds

Phone and Tablet Tips Brilliant things to do on your device

ANDROID & iOS

Use your fingerprint to buy apps

Most new devices come with fingerprint scanning technology. Apple and Samsung devices have a fingerprint scanner on their home button, while other Android phones and tablets have this at the rear of the device (usually below the camera lens).

You'll be prompted to set up a fingerprint scan when you switch on your device for the first time. It's worthwhile doing this because using a fingerprint scan to unlock your device is more secure than using a passcode. You can also use it to make payments when buying apps and other media (such as music) from app stores. The method to set this up differs slightly on Android and iOS.

On Android, open any paid-for app or media you want to buy, then tap Buy. You'll now be prompted for your Google password. Tick 'Use fingerprint for future purchases', type your password and tap Confirm (see screenshot below left). In future, you'll be prompted to enter your fingerprint instead of your password.

On iOS, open Settings, tap Touch ID & Passcode, then tap the 'iTunes and App Store' slider to turn it on. You'll need to enter your Apple ID password the first time you do this. Now whenever you buy anything from the App Store, you'll see a Touch ID prompt, instead of your Apple ID password.

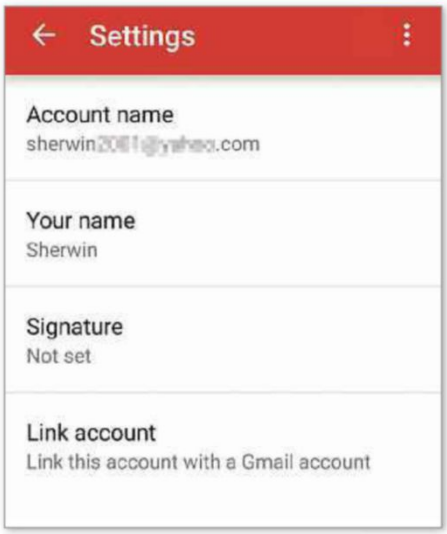
ANDROID

Add new Gmail features to non-Gmail accounts

While you could previously add other email accounts (such as Yahoo or Outlook) to the Gmail app, you couldn't use many of Google's handy features in these. This included advanced spam protection, automatic email sorting (into three categories - Social, Updates and Promotions), advanced search options, and travel and hotel reservations that appeared as information 'cards' in Google search results.

That has now changed. Now, if you add an account to Gmail, you will be able to use these excellent features. To do so, tap the menu button, Settings at the bottom, then tap 'Add account'. Now select Personal, tap Next, enter your login details for the account you want to add and agree to the prompts by tapping Next.

If you've already added a non-Gmail account to the app, you need to enable these features. To do that, tap the three lines at the top left (menu button), scroll to the bottom, tap Settings, then select your non-Gmail account. Now tap 'Link account' (see screenshot above), Get Started, Next, log into your account, click Agree, then OK.



After a few minutes, you'll see emails from your non-Gmail accounts sorted into the three categories mentioned above. You'll also be able to use Google's advanced search tools (www.snipca.com/19708), and you'll notice that any upcoming reservation emails (such as flights and concert tickets) will appear as notification cards in Google search results. Read more on Gmail's blog: www.snipca.com/19732

Best New Apps What you should install this fortnight

Guides by Lonely Planet

Free

Android: www.snipca.com/19681

iOS: www.snipca.com/19682

This is a must-have app for anyone heading off on holiday. It gives you access to Lonely Planet's vast array of essential travel tips and city guides. It also has a currency converter, lets you bookmark interesting places and download maps to use offline.

London's Secret WWII

Free

Android: www.snipca.com/19683

iOS: www.snipca.com/19684

This app shows you which buildings in London were used by intelligence agencies during the Second World War. These appear as orange dots on a map. Tap one to read interesting facts, watch videos and listen to accounts by people who lived and worked there during the war years.

Airmail

£3.99

iOS: www.snipca.com/19685

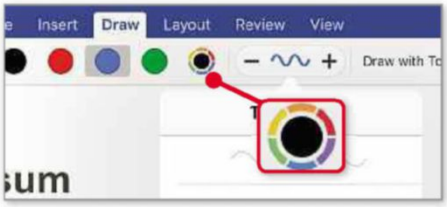
If you want an email app that you can customise extensively, Airmail is worth considering. You can add multiple accounts, change what happens when you swipe across emails in your inbox, set push notifications for selected emails, and attach files from – and save them to – any cloud-storage app.

iOS

Highlight and annotate content using Office for iPad

If you have Office apps on your iPad (www.snipca.com/19712), you can use Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint's new Inking feature to make quick highlights and annotations. Open the Office file you want, then tap the new Draw tab that appears at the top. You'll see different pen tools at the top left, next to a selection of colours. Click to select a pen tool or highlighter (the one with the pink nib is the eraser). Click the squiggly icon on the right to change the thickness of the tool.

You'll see four colours at the top that you can tap to select. To use another colour, tap the black circle with a multi-coloured outline (see screenshot below) and move the palette to select the shade you want. When you've finished making your markings, tap the top-left back icon, then tap Save. You'll be prompted to log into your Microsoft account. After doing so, you'll see options to save the file to a folder in OneDrive.

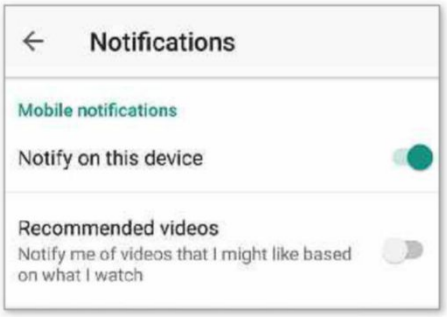


ANDROID & iOS

Customise your YouTube feed

Whenever you open the YouTube app, it displays suggestions based on videos you've watched previously. There's an easy way to disable this feature if you find these suggestions don't reflect your tastes. Open the app, tap the three dots at the top right, Settings, then Notifications. Now tap the slider beside 'Recommended videos' to turn this off (see screenshot below).

Search terms you've entered also influence the video suggestions you receive. You can prevent this in the Android app (but not iOS) by removing previous search terms. Tap the search icon at the top right to see search terms you've used recently. To remove one, tap and hold it, then tap Remove.



WINDOWS PHONE

Set a specific ringtone for one of your contacts

There's an easy way to set a specific ringtone and text-message alert for a particular contact. First tap the People icon on your Start screen. Now scroll to and tap the relevant contact. Next, tap the pen 'edit' icon at the bottom, then tap '+ringtone' to see a list of options. Tap the play icon beside the tone that you want to hear and tap the ringtone name to select it (we chose 'Symmetry' – see screenshot above). Now tap '+text alert tone' and repeat the process. When you've finished, tap the floppy-disc icon at the bottom to save your changes.

Games With Kids

What to play together on your phone and tablet

AGES 0-5

Peekaboo Universe

£2.29 www.snipca.com/19686 (iOS)

This game will take your toddler across 10 different planets, where they need to find (by tapping) the seven alien creatures hiding within each one. They can tap the Help button (top right) to see clues to the aliens' whereabouts. There's no time limit or annoying adverts.

AGES 6-10

Rainmaker – The Beautiful Flood

£2.99 www.snipca.com/19687 (iOS)

In this engrossing puzzle, your child plays the part of a little girl, Tian, who has to find her way to the exit to reach the next level (60 in total). She can morph into three different forms (a heavy rock, a weightless bubble and a bouncy basketball) to help her navigate better.

AGES 11-16

Word Streak With Friends*

Free www.snipca.com/19688 (Android)
Free www.snipca.com/19689 (iOS)

Challenge your kids to a 'vocabulary duel' in this word game. For example, you may need to form words using the highlighted letters in a grid. You can improve your skills in 'practice mode' then compete in online tournaments.

*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 10

Add a 'slide to shut down' feature to your touchscreen PC

If you have a Windows 10 touchscreen computer, there's an easy way to add an option that lets you shut down your PC by simply swiping down from the top of your screen. This is slightly quicker than the traditional way of shutting down – from the Start menu. Most Windows 10 touchscreen computers come with this feature, but you have to enable it first and create a shortcut.

To do that, right-click an empty area of your screen, move your cursor to New, then click Shortcut. In the location field, type %windir%\System32\SlideToShutDown.exe. Now click Next, then name your Desktop shortcut ('shut down', for example). Whenever you want to shut down your, simply double-click or tap this shortcut. You'll see a 'Slide to shut down your PC' message. Tap the message on your screen, then drag it to the bottom to shut down your PC.

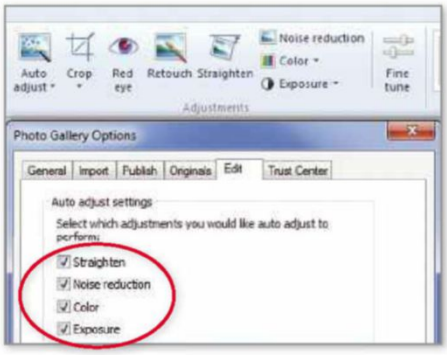
WINDOWS 7, 8.1

Fix your photos with one click

Not everyone has an eye for taking good photos. Thankfully, Windows Photo Gallery has a brilliant 'Auto adjust' tool that lets you enhance your photos with a single click. While you can tweak individual elements of your photo (alignment, noise, colour, exposure and so on), this one-click option does a great job at making improvements in one go.

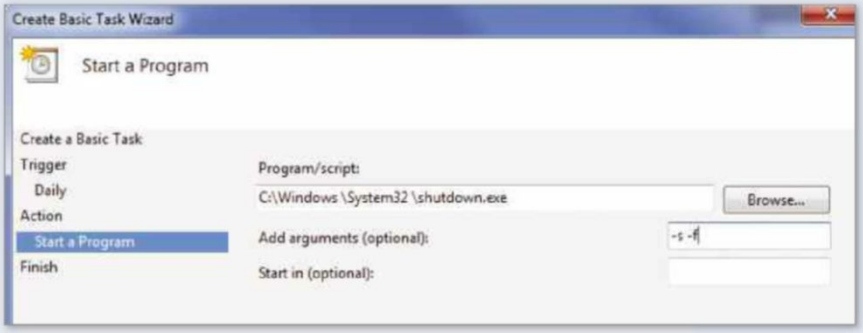
Open Windows Photo Gallery (part of Windows Essentials). If you don't have the program, download and install it for free from www.snipca.com/19595. The program automatically imports all your photos following installation. Now open the photo you want to edit by selecting its folder on the left, then double-clicking the photo to open it.

Next, click the 'Auto adjust' dropdown menu at the top (in the Adjustments section), then click Settings. Now tick all four boxes (see screenshot below left), then click OK. Finally, click the 'Auto adjust' button to add the one-click fix to your photo. You can undo any changes by clicking the 'Revert to original' button at the top right.



WINDOWS 7, 8, 10

Shut down your PC at a specific time



There are many instances when you may want to set your PC to shut down at a specific time. For example, following a full system scan or a time-consuming download just before your head off to bed or leave the house. Windows doesn't have a default feature that lets you do this, but it's easy to create a scheduled task to achieve the same result.

Press the Windows key, type scheduled tasks, then click Scheduled Tasks in the Control Panel section. In your Windows Task Scheduler, click Create Basic Task. Name the task, give it a brief description, then click Next.

Now set a task frequency - if you want your PC to automatically shut down at the same time every day, select Daily, otherwise select 'One time', then click Next. Set the date and time you want to shut down your PC and click Next again. On the following screen, select 'Start a program' and click Next again. Now type C:\Windows \System32 \shutdown.exe into the 'Program/script' field (see screenshot). In the 'Add arguments' field, type -s –f. (–s initiates the 'shut down' command and -f will close any background programs). Finally, click Next, Yes, then Finish.

• **See Fast Fixes in Issue 469 if you have problems shutting down your PC**

WINDOWS 7, 8.1

Fix faulty quotation-mark keys

If your single quote (') or double quote (") keys don't display quotation marks until you type the following letter, then there's likely to be a problem with your keyboard settings. This is a common fault, especially on new PCs. The easiest fix involves changing your PC's language settings. Open your Control Panel, click the 'Clock, Language, and Region' link, 'Change keyboards or other input methods', then the 'Change keyboards' button. Now select 'United States – International' in the list and click Remove. Next, click the Add button, click the 'English (United Kingdom)' extended menu, select 'United Kingdom (Default)' (see screenshot above), then click OK. Finally, click Apply and OK and your quotation-mark keys should now work as normal.

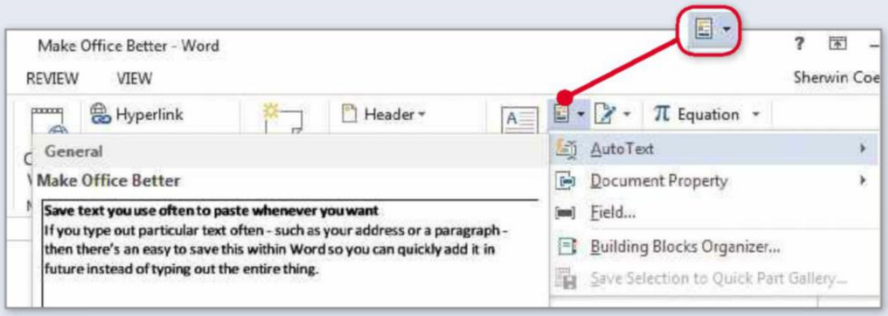
Make Office Better

Expert tips for every program

WORD

Save text you use often for easy access

If you type specific text on a regular basis – for example, your address or the first few lines of a letter – there's an easy way to save this within Word so you can quickly add it in future. To do this, type the text you want to save, highlight it, click the Insert tab, then click the Explore Quick Parts icon (see screenshot) in the Text section of the Ribbon. Next, move your cursor to AutoText, then click 'Save Selection to AutoText Gallery' at the bottom. Name the text, give it a brief description, then click OK. Repeat this to add other sections of text.



Now whenever you want to add any of these saved sections of text to your document, simply click the Insert tab, then the Explore Quick Parts icon, move your cursor to AutoText and select the title of the text section you want.

If you find yourself using this feature a lot, then you should add the AutoText icon to your Quick Access Toolbar (top left of Word) for easy access. To do that, click the File tab, Options, then Quick Access Toolbar on the left. You'll see two columns. Click the dropdown menu at the top of the left-hand column, select 'Insert tab', then click AutoText in the list below. Now click Add, then OK at the bottom right. Finally, you can click the AutoText icon on your Quick Access Toolbar to see your saved sections of text.

OUTLOOK

Merge contact entries in your address book

Outlook has a useful feature that lets you merge any contact whose details you've entered twice, perhaps under different names or with different details (landline number, mobile number, multiple email addresses). To do that, click People at the bottom left, then select the first contact entry you want to merge. Next, click the three dots at the top right (beside Edit), then click Link Contacts. In the Search People field, type the name of the second contact you want to merge, select the relevant autosuggest option, and then click OK.

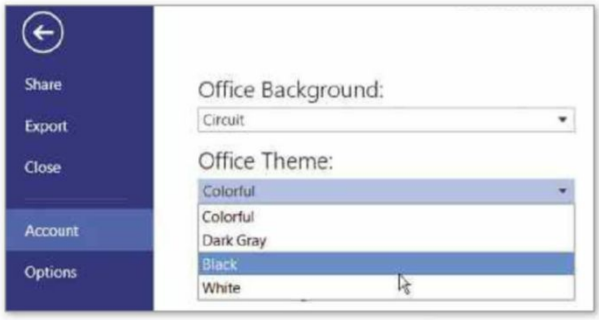
OFFICE

Use Office 2016's new themes

If you use Office 2016, it's worth checking out its many coloured themes (displayed above the tab menu at the top). While earlier versions of Office have only three themes (White, Light Gray and Dark Gray), Office 2016 has four – White, Dark Gray, Black and Colourful.

The easiest way to change a theme (in any version of Office) is to click File at the top left of any Office program, then click Account. Next, click the Office Theme dropdown menu and select the one you want (see screenshot below left). Applying a theme to one Office program automatically adds it to the others.

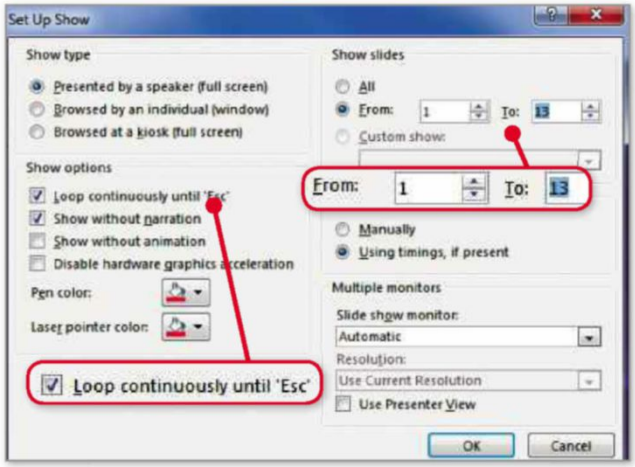
In Office 2016, Colourful represents the default colour for that program (light blue for Outlook, dark blue for Word, green for Excel and orange for PowerPoint).



POWERPOINT

Set your presentation to play on a loop

If you've created a slideshow of photos, perhaps to celebrate someone's birthday, there's an easy way to set it to play on a constant loop at their celebration (it's also a useful way to check your presentation for errors).



To do this, click the SlideShow tab, then Set Up Slide Show (in the Set Up section of the Ribbon). In the Show Options section tick 'Loop continuously until 'Esc'' (see screenshot above). Tick the boxes below if you want to play your slideshow without narration or animated effects. If you only want your loop to include certain slides within the slideshow, select From at the top right, set the From and To fields to the relevant slides, then click OK. Now untick Use Presenter View in your SlideShow tab, then click From Beginning (at the top left of the same tab) to play your presentation on a loop. To stop it, press the Esc key.

Windows 10 gestures

Swipe to switch apps, tap to launch Cortana, and enable hidden features

Swipe to scroll and pan

You're probably familiar with single-finger swiping on iOS and Android smartphone and tablet screens to scroll, but did you know that you can do the same on Windows 10 laptops? Simply swipe two fingers across your laptop's touchpad. You can also pan with two fingers by swiping your fingers in any direction – the website or document will follow your movement. Some touchpads even allow single-finger scrolling, by swiping up and down at the far right of the pad (see the final tip on this page for more on why some tips here work only on certain touchpads).

Reverse the scroll direction

Assuming your touchpad supports the feature, you can reverse the direction of the two-finger scroll gesture. This might sound like an odd thing to do but having documents and web pages move in the same direction as your fingers (as they do on a touchscreen) soon feels totally natural. Click Start, then Settings, followed by Devices, then 'Mouse & touchpad'. Next, under Touchpad, slide the 'Reverse scrolling direction' switch to On.

Tap, hold and swipe with three fingers to flip through apps in Windows 10

Slide for Task View or Desktop

One of Windows 10's best touchpad gestures requires the use of three fingers at the same time. Form a tight bunch with your index, middle and ring fingers and then just swipe up or down. Swipe up to reveal Task View, from where you can pick a desired app or window; or swipe down to show the Desktop.

Flip through open apps with your fingers

The three-finger gesture also lets you swipe left or right to flip through apps you've recently used. If you keep your fingers pressed down on the touchpad as you do this you can cycle smoothly through open apps and windows (see screenshot above). It's a bit like using Windows key+Tab in Windows 7 to use the Flip 3D feature (incidentally, using that shortcut in Windows 10 launches Task View).

Launch Cortana with a tap

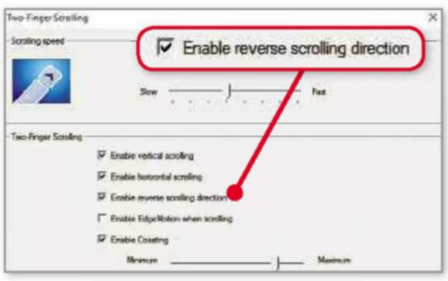
There's more to Windows 10 gestures than swiping. Want to launch Cortana? A three-finger tap on your touchpad and your word is her command. Alternatively, to bring up Cortana's right-click menu, just tap the pad with two fingers.

Pinch to zoom

Pinching to zoom is second nature on smartphones and tablets. You can use the same gesture on your Windows 10 touchpad to magnify the view, or shrink something to fit the screen. Just pinch your thumb and forefinger on the pad to shrink, or spread them to zoom.

Set up precision gestures

Some of the gestures described here require what Microsoft calls a 'precision touchpad'. To check if you have one, click Start, Settings, then Devices, followed by 'Mouse & touchpad'. Next, look for the message 'Your PC has a precision touchpad'. If it's not there, you might be able to enable some of these and other features via the touchpad's own driver. Click 'Additional mouse options', select the Device Settings tab, then click Settings. To enable reverse scrolling, for instance, double-click to expand the Scrolling section, then the same for Two-Finger Scroll, then tick the 'Enable reverse scrolling direction' box (see screenshot below).



Enable hidden gestures by tweaking your touchpad's driver settings

Fill screen with open app windows

The Windows Snap feature first appeared in Windows 7 but it's been extended in Windows 10, so you can now do more with it.

Snap gestures can be performed with either a touchpad or mouse (though they're easier with a mouse). The basics are the same as in Windows 7: left-click the title bar of any window, then drag it to either the extreme left or right of the screen to have that window 'snap' into place, occupying one half of the screen.

When you do this in Windows 10, Task View appears in the adjacent half of the screen: just click a program's thumbnail to fill the other half with that program. Also, you can adjust the split by clicking, dragging and dropping the divider bar in the middle – the content of the windows will adjust automatically. You can even go a step further in Windows 10, to create a two-by-two setup of 'snapped' apps (see screenshot). Simply drag one app's title bar to any corner. Repeat for the second and third. For the fourth, just click the app's thumbnail in the Task View pane that appears.

Next issue Secret Tips For... the Kindle

SkyBender

Google is taking to the skies to provide faster internet

Is that the next James Bond film?

It would be a good title, so we may suggest it to Daniel Craig the next time we bump into him. But Google might sue, because it's actually a top-secret project from the company to deliver 5G internet from solar-powered drones.

What's 5G again?

It's the next generation of mobile Wi-Fi, which is what you use to connect your phones and tablets to the internet. It's potentially 40 times faster than 4G, the current mobile Wi-Fi standard, which is now widely available in the UK (although dead spots remain, such as Cornwall, Aberdeenshire and Hull).

Using 5G will enable you to download HD films in seconds. It's still at the trial stage, though hopes are high it will be ready in the next few years. In 2014, Mayor Boris Johnson said London would be "5G ready" by 2020.

What's 'top secret' about SkyBender?

Not much, now that its existence has been leaked. In January, *The Guardian* obtained documents showing that Google has tested drones in New Mexico, using Spaceport America as its base. It's also home to Virgin Galactic, Richard Branson's ambitious venture that hopes to send commercial passengers into space. The drones have been built by Titan Aerospace, a US company Google bought in 2014.

Last year Facebook released this photo of a test drone that can 'beam' the internet to Earth

Why is Google testing 5G this way?

Because it wants to deliver high-speed internet from the air. It has already done so in New Zealand using 'superpressure' balloons – part of Project Loon (www.google.com/loon) – which float at 60,000 feet. But the aim of Loon is less about speed, and more about getting internet access to the billions of people who live in rural or underdeveloped areas (around two-thirds of the world's population). With SkyBender, the emphasis is very much about providing super-fast internet.

Are other companies testing drones?

Yes, Facebook for one. Last year, it conducted test flights in the UK with a drone that has a 142-foot wingspan, wider than a Boeing 737 (see 'What's all the Fuss About?', Issue 465 and image left). Facebook's aim, described as "freaking" hard by one of its top engineers, is to beam internet signals between drones 200 miles apart.

Will Google's drones work like that too?

Nobody knows for sure. Google has made no official comment on *The Guardian*'s claims, and there are no recent photos (the picture above of a Titan drone is about one year old). But we do know that Google is testing high-frequency millimetre-wave radio, which in theory can transmit gigabits of data every second. That blitzes your average 24Mbps home broadband, not that Ken Rigsby would care (see The Final Straw, page 74).

Sounds great. But how soon will it arrive?

Not this year. Possibly not even this decade. Using millimetre-wave radio has advantages, such as freeing up part of the wireless spectrum that's already crammed with phone signals. But it has one serious drawback: its range is around one-tenth shorter than current 4G signals. To compensate, Google's drones will need to transmit an extremely strong signal, which is beyond the power of conventional solar-powered aircraft.

So what's the solution?

A phased array, which is a new technique that uses multiple antennas to send signals further. Google will experiment with this on its drones, but it's incredibly complex, and difficult to get right. So it seems likely that we'll be droning on about the potential of sky-high broadband for some time to come.

How to customise...

Windows 10 The 24 Changes You Must Make »

»» Not happy with how Windows 10 looks and works? Don't worry – you can customise every aspect of it to your liking. Windows 10 expert Jonathan Parkyn explains how

Despite courting controversy – thanks, in part, to its somewhat carefree attitude to users' privacy (see our Cover Feature, Issue 469) – Windows 10 is gaining popularity at an astonishing rate. According to Netmarketshare (http://netmarketshare.com) and StatCounter (statcounter.com), which monitor the worldwide usage of operating systems (OS), only Windows 7 is more popular than Windows 10 (see box below). Microsoft's latest OS reached another major milestone in February when it eclipsed Windows XP for the first time.

People the world over are embracing Windows 10 – partly because they can upgrade for free, but also because the OS looks great and is easy to use. However, even those who love it will admit that Windows 10 is far from perfect. Perhaps you find the on-screen text too small or difficult to read, or perhaps you don't like the live tiles in the Start menu. Whatever your gripes and grievances, you'll be pleased to know there are easy ways to modify Microsoft's default settings and get Windows 10 looking and working exactly how you want. Over the next few pages we'll show you how to customise, tweak and hack your way through the OS until you've eliminated everything you don't like about it.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Tweak the Start menu, taskbar and more to suit you better
- Make Windows 10 easier to see and more comfortable to work with
- Hack Windows 10 with free tools to customise almost anything

OPERATING SYSTEMS MARKET SHARE

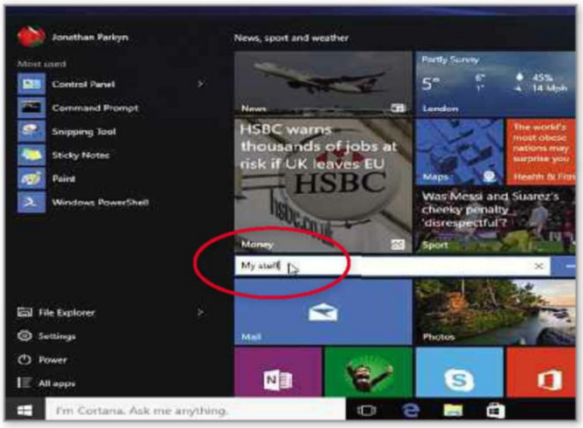
- Windows 7 – 52%
- Windows 10 – 12%
- Windows XP – 11%
- Windows 8.1 – 10%
- Windows 8 – 3%
- Mac OS X 10.11 – 3%
- Linux – 2%
- Windows Vista – 2%
- Others – 5%

CUSTOMISE THE START MENU

1 Resize the Start menu

Unlike the relatively small panel that pops up when you click Start in Windows 7 or XP, the Windows 10 Start menu can take over a sizable portion of your Desktop. But there's an easy way to cut it down to size. Click Start, then move your mouse over the menu's top or right-hand edge and the cursor will turn into a double-headed arrow. Click and drag downwards from the top edge to adjust the menu's height, or drag left from the right edge to make it narrower.

On the other hand, if you find it too cramped, you can enlarge it by dragging upwards and outwards. And, for a Windows 8-style Start screen, click Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Start, and turn on the 'Use Start full screen' option.



Group your tiles into categories then name them

Simple and neat – this is what the Start menu looks like without any live tiles

2 Move, resize, remove or add tiles

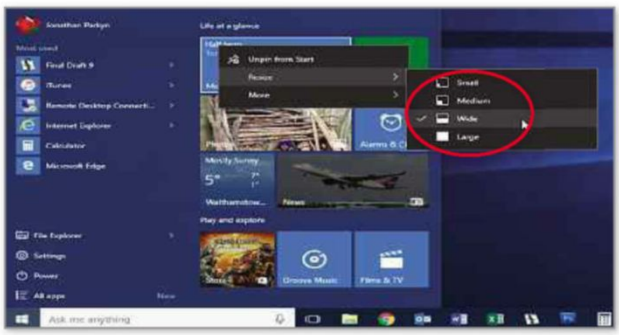
By default, the Windows 10 Start menu is divided into two halves, with colourful tiles on the right-hand side. But you don't have to stick with this default arrangement. Click a tile, hold your mouse button down, then drag the tile to where you want it. To resize a tile, right-click it then select Resize. In most cases you'll be shown a selection of sizes – Small, Medium, Wide or Large (see screenshot below) – though some tiles don't have all four options.

Right-clicking also lets you 'Unpin from Start', which whisks the tile away. You can add new tiles to the Start menu by right-clicking almost anything you like (programs listed in 'All apps', files, folders, shortcuts on your Desktop and more) then selecting 'Pin to Start'.

3 Turn live tiles on or off

If you'd rather avoid the flickering distraction of animated live tiles, it's easy to switch them off. Click Start, then right-click a live tile and select More, then 'Turn live tile off'.

If, on the other hand, you find live tiles a vibrant addition to your Desktop, you can enable additional ones by right-clicking a non-live tile, selecting More, then clicking 'Turn live tile on'. Be aware that not all tiles let you do this; it's usually only those that are associated with Windows Store apps and which deliver regularly updated information, such as, news, sports results and weather forecasts.



Resize a tile by right-clicking it then choosing Small, Medium, Wide or Large

4 Group tiles using your own categories

Windows 10 arranges Start menu tiles into pre-assigned groups: 'Explore Windows', 'Life at a glance' and so on. To rename an existing group, click the heading, select the current text, then type your own group name (ours is the deeply unimaginative 'My stuff' - see screenshot above left). To create a new group, click and drag a tile to the very bottom of the Start menu until a blank, coloured bar appears above it. Release the tile and move your mouse to the blank area above the tile and you'll see 'Name group' appear – click and type a category name.

Drag tiles under your category heading to add them to the group. You can move groups of tiles by clicking the heading and dragging. Dragging all tiles out of a group will automatically remove the heading.

5 Remove live tiles completely

If you *really* dislike Windows 10's tiles, then you can remove them all and shrink the Start menu down to a simple, neat, single-column panel (see screenshot above right). Annoyingly, you'll need to right-click each tile individually and select 'Unpin from Start'. When you've done this, click the right edge of the menu and drag it left.

6 Banish adverts from the Start menu

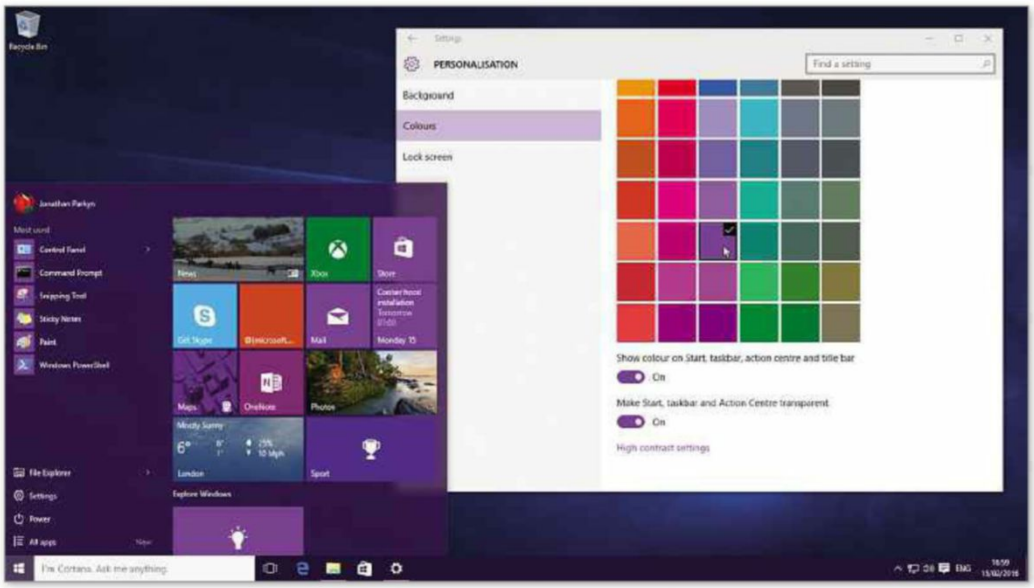
By default, Microsoft advertises 'suggested' apps in the Start menu. To turn these off, click Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Start. Click the switch under 'Occasionally show suggestions in Start' to Off. Next, open the Windows Store app, click your account icon, then Settings and click 'Show products on tile' to Off. ▶

TWEAK THE START MENU WITH FREE TOOLS

If none of the tweaks we've suggested go far enough and you'd like even more control over your Start menu, you could consider installing a third-party tool. Anyone who has used Windows 8 will probably be familiar with Classic Shell (www.classicshell.net). It effectively banishes Windows 8's Start screen and allows you to restore a classic Windows-style Start menu. But Classic Shell is also compatible with Windows 10, where it lets you configure almost any aspect of your Start menu, including menu styles, jump lists, shutdown button behaviour and more. Follow our Workshop on page 35 to learn more about installing and using it.

There are other, Windows 10-specific alternative tools available, though these tend to cost money – Stardock's Start10 (www.snipca.com/19651), for example, costs about £3.

CHANGE THE WAY WINDOWS 10 LOOKS



Pick a colour for your interface that looks nice with your desktop

7 Change your colour scheme

Click Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Colours. Under 'Choose your accent colour' you can change the colour of the interface's highlights, such as the Start menu tiles. Or you can allow Windows to pick a colour that complements your chosen desktop wallpaper by switching on 'Automatically pick an accent colour from my background'. You can make the interface even more colourful by scrolling to 'Show colour on Start, taskbar, action centre and title bar', and switching it on. The setting below lets you choose between transparent effects or solid colours for the Start menu, taskbar and Action Centre.

8 Personalise your desktop and lock screen

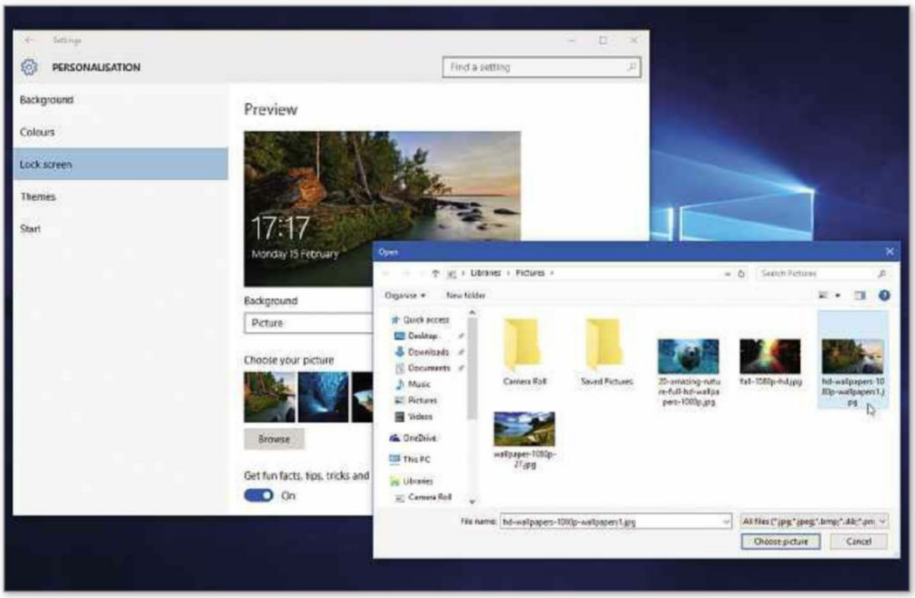
Click Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Background. From the Background dropdown menu choose Picture, 'Solid colour' or Slideshow. For Picture and Slideshow, click Browse to locate a file or folder of pictures you want to use, then select your preference from the 'Choose a fit' menu. For Slideshows, choose how frequently the images update from the 'Change picture every' dropdown menu. Enabling Shuffle randomises the selection. Now click 'Lock screen' on the left. Again, under Background, you can select Picture or Slideshow and browse for images (see screenshot below). But you can also choose 'Windows spotlight' here, which will display random images from Microsoft whenever you lock your PC.

9 Download free themes

Windows 7-style themes – combinations of backdrops, colours and system sounds – are still available in Windows 10, but they're somewhat buried. Click Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Themes. Click 'Theme settings' to launch the familiar Windows 7 Personalisation Control Panel. A small selection of pre-defined default themes is offered here – click one to apply it. To download additional themes, click the 'Get more themes online' link (see screenshot above right). This will open a web page in your browser, from which you can view and download any themes that take your fancy. They're all free.

10 Add useful icons to your desktop

By default, Windows 10 only shows the Recycle Bin icon on the desktop, but it's



You can choose your own photos to appear on Windows 10's lock screen

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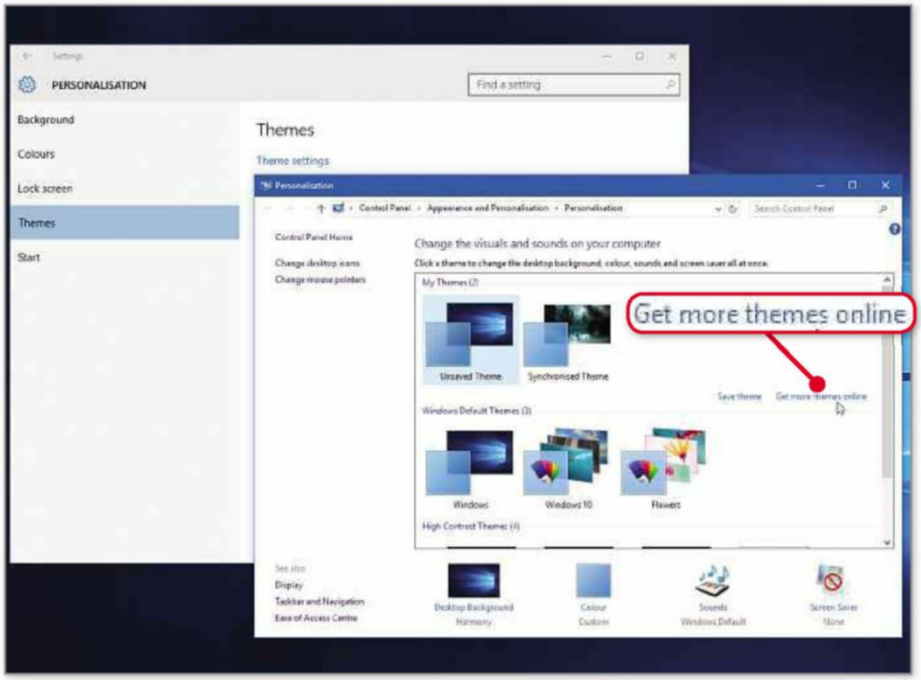
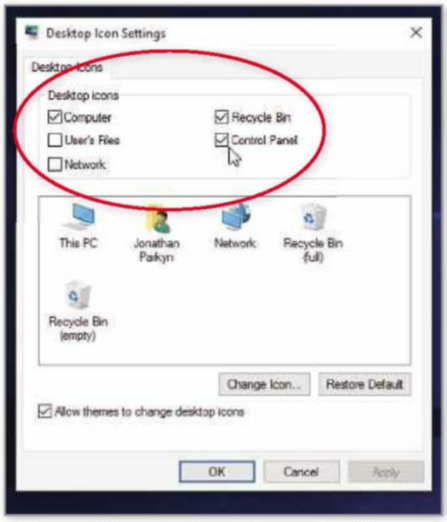


Click 'Get more themes online' to download themes from the web



You can add several icons to your desktop, including a link to your Control Panel

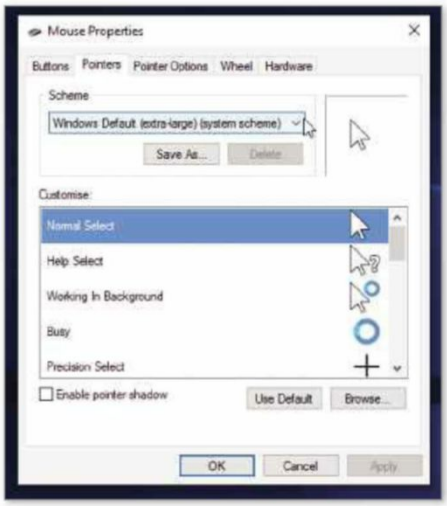
possible to add more, including a handy link to the Control Panel. Click Start, Settings, Personalisation, then Themes. Click 'Desktop icon settings' and, in the box that opens, put a tick next to any of the icons you'd like to add (you can also choose User's Files, Network and Computer), then click Apply (see screenshot above right). You can also change the look of the icons themselves – click one of the icons displayed, then click the Change Icon button to select a new one.

11 Change your mouse cursors

Click Start, Settings, Personalisation, Themes, then click 'Mouse pointer settings'. From the Scheme dropdown menu you can select a variety of alternative cursor styles, including larger variations on the default scheme. This can help if you're having trouble seeing the cursor on your screen. Click Apply when you've made your selection.

Alternatively, in the Customise section, you can click on each individual cursor in your scheme then click Browse to select another one. Adding a drop-shadow to the mouse by ticking the option at the bottom of the box can help make the cursor easier to see.

You can also change how quickly your mouse wheel works - just click the Wheel tab at the top.



Windows 10 gives you lots of way to change the mouse cursor (or 'pointer')

MAKE WINDOWS 10 EASIER TO SEE

1 MAKE ICONS AND TEXT BIGGER

Right-click the desktop, select 'Display settings', then use the slider to increase the size of all on-screen elements.

2 MAKE *EVERYTHING* BIGGER

Right-click the desktop, select 'Display settings', click 'Advanced display settings', then 'Advanced sizing of text and other items'. Under 'Change size of items', click 'set a custom scaling level'. Use the dropdown menu in the ruler window that opens to select your scaling percentage, then click OK, Apply. You'll be prompted to sign out, then sign in again for the setting to take effect.

3 MAKE ONLY TEXT LARGER

Navigate to 'Advanced sizing of text and other items' as described above, then choose the text elements you want to enlarge from the dropdown menu under 'Change the text size only'. Select the font size from the dropdown menu next to it. Click Apply for each element that you decide to change.

4 MAGNIFY TEXT

Click Start, Settings, 'Ease of access', Magnifier and switch Magnifier on – this will magnify the section of your desktop immediately surrounding your mouse cursor. You can customise the magnification amount and the tool's behaviour by clicking the magnifying glass icon on your desktop.

5 USE A HIGH-CONTRAST THEME

Click Start, Settings, 'Ease of access', then 'High contrast' to select a high-contrast theme from the dropdown menu. Click Apply.

6 CHANGE THE CURSOR'S THICKNESS

As well as making the mouse cursor bigger (see tip 11), you can increase its thickness when it's blinking. Click Start, Settings, 'Ease of access', then 'Other options' and use the slider.

Computer active

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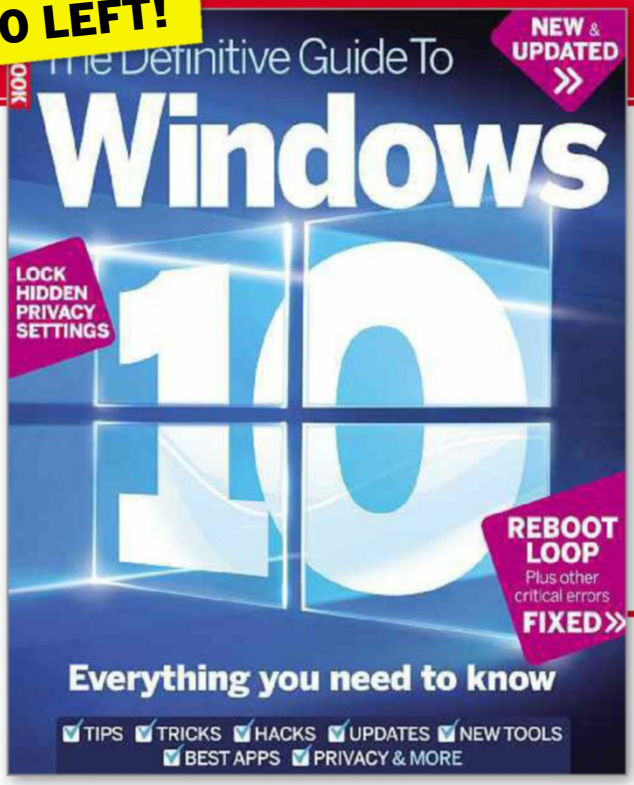
LESS THAN 100 LEFT!



THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO WINDOWS 10

This 148-page book is the only guide you need on Microsoft's new operating system. You'll learn how to master all the new tools, lock Microsoft's weak privacy settings and prevent future updates from wrecking your PC. It includes fixes for all the problems and bugs that have appeared in Windows 10 since it launched. Plus, you'll discover how to make Cortana understand you, remove the apps you hate, fix the dreaded Reboot Loop problem, master the new Edge browser, and stop Microsoft sharing your personal info.

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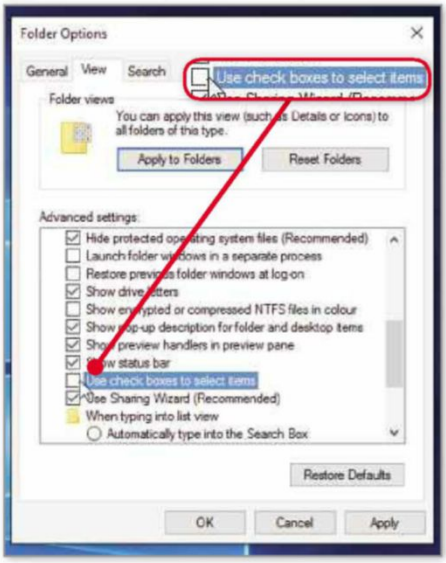
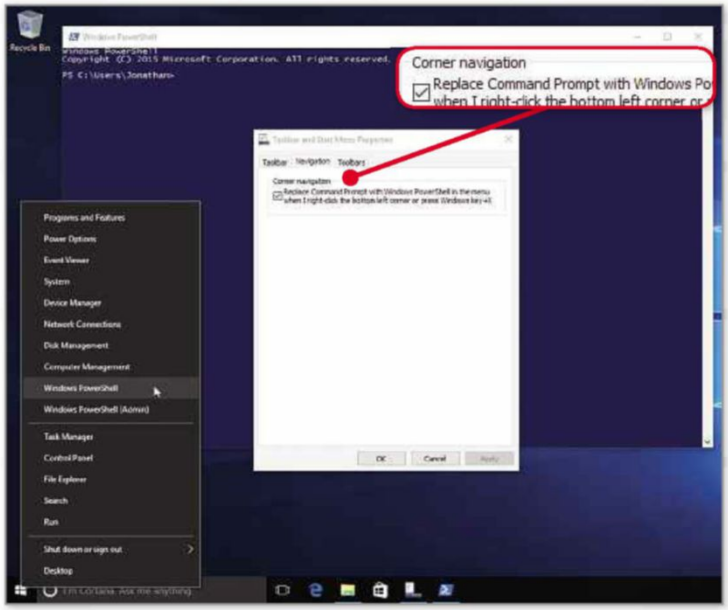
CHANGE THE WAY WINDOWS 10 WORKS



Untick this option to remove check boxes from icons



Tick this option to replace Command Prompt with PowerShell

12 Get rid of check boxes on icons

Windows 10's icons display check boxes when you select them, which can be distracting. To remove them click Start, File Explorer. Then click View, Options and, in the box that appears, click the View tab. In the 'Advanced settings' section, scroll down to 'Use check boxes to select items' – untick this, then click OK (see screenshot above).

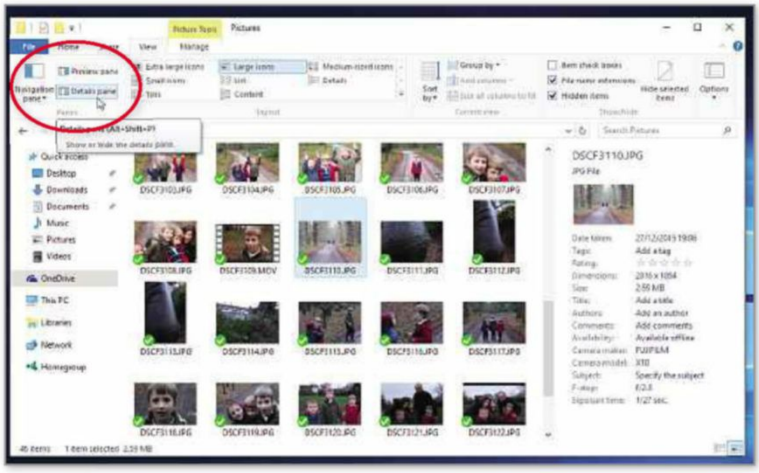
13 Change the way File Explorer works

The new version of File Explorer is highly customisable. Click Start, File Explorer, then click the View tab for some options. Use the top-left Panes section to add or remove the Navigation, Preview or Details panes (see screenshot below).

The Details pane is particularly useful – it sits on the right and provides lots of information about any file you click without you having to open it. In the Layout section, you can choose how items are displayed in the main part of the window. You could switch to extra-large icons, for example, or choose Details, which lets you sort items by name, date, type, size and more. You can use the options in the 'Current view' section to sort or group items the way you want.

14 Add a handy shortcut to Windows PowerShell

The Windows PowerShell is a very useful command-line console that lets you do everything the Command Prompt can, and more besides. And you can customise Windows 10's shortcuts to go to PowerShell instead of the Command Prompt, if you prefer. Right-click the taskbar then select Properties. In the box that opens, click the Navigation tab, tick the 'Replace Command Prompt with PowerShell...' option (see screenshot above), then click OK. Now, when you right-click the Start button, you'll find a useful shortcut to the PowerShell. You can also open the PowerShell by using the Windows key+X keyboard shortcut.



Add or remove Navigation, Preview or Details from the Panes section in File Explorer

15 Switch File Explorer back to My Computer

Windows 10's new Quick Access view is how File Explorer appears when you open it. It displays a selection of frequently used folders and recently used files. Quick Access can be useful, but it's very different from the old My Computer-style view used in Windows XP and 7, which displayed your PC's drives and devices. To revert to using this instead, click Start, File Explorer, View, then click Options. On the General tab, select This PC from the 'Open File Explorer to' dropdown menu and click OK.

16 Switch to single-clicking

Double-clicking has long been the default way to launch programs and open files in Windows. But there's no reason to stick with this if you don't like it – it's easy to change to single-clicking. Click Start, File Explorer, View, then click Options. On the General tab, click 'Single-click to open an item (point to select)' (see top-right screenshot on page 56) to select it, then select 'Underline icon titles only when I point at them' and click OK. This will give you a more web browser-like experience, where items you point to on the desktop or in File Explorer will display a line underneath them to show you've selected them. Clicking items once will open them.

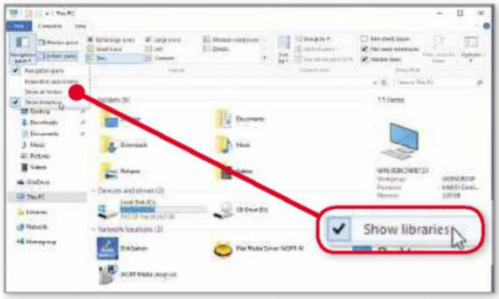
17 Customise Quick Actions

Windows 10's Quick Actions menu – not to be confused with Quick Access – is a selection of shortcuts that appears in Action Centre. To see which shortcuts you currently have, click the speech-bubble icon in the notification area. The four buttons at the bottom are your Quick Actions. You can click Expand to see more, but you can also re-organise them so that the four Quick Actions you use most are always available, without having to click Expand. Click Start, Settings, System, then 'Notifications & actions'. Here, click each of the four icons shown under 'Quick actions', then select the items you want.

18 Create another desktop

Thankfully, the desktop is at the heart of how you use Windows 10 - a relief following Windows 8's disorientating Start screen interface. Proving that you can never get too much of a good thing, Windows 10 lets you create multiple desktops that you can switch between using the Task View button on the taskbar or via the Windows key+Tab keyboard shortcut.

This can be a very handy way to keep organised while you work. For example, it can prevent your main desktop from getting cluttered with web browsers or media players by letting you position them on a different screen - even if you have just one monitor. To create another desktop, click the Task View button, then click 'New desktop' on the right.



Click 'Show libraries' to get Windows 7's libraries in Windows 10

19 Change Windows 10's default search engine

Unsurprisingly, Microsoft wants you to search the web using its search engine Bing. So when you type anything into the Search box on Windows 10's taskbar, you see results in Bing. You can change this to Google, but only if you set Chrome as your default web browser instead of Edge.

Install Chrome from www.google.com/chrome if you don't already have it. Then click Start, Settings, System, 'Default apps' and make sure Chrome is the default web browser. Open Chrome and go to www.snipca.com/19662 – this will take you to the page for Chrometana, a Chrome extension that redirects Bing searches to the search engine of your choice. Click 'Add to Chrome', then 'Add extension', then select Google (or your preferred search engine) from those listed. Close Chrome and try a web search from Windows' taskbar Search box – you should now see a page of Google results.

20 Show Libraries in File Explorer

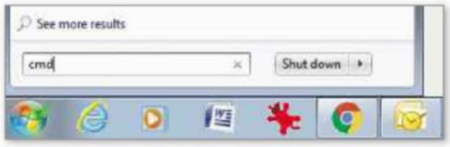
Windows 7 trained us to use Libraries – centralised locations for files of specific types, such as Documents, Pictures, Music and Videos. But just as we were all getting used to them, Windows 10 came along and relegated them in File Explorer, leaving them out of the left-hand Navigation pane altogether. To get them back, click Start, File Explorer, then View. Click the 'Navigation pane' button then tick the 'Show libraries' option (see screenshot left).

Don't like double-clicking? It's easy to change to a single click

21 Customise the Command Prompt

You can change the way Windows 10's Command Prompt looks and works by clicking Start, typing cmd and pressing Enter (see screenshot below). Right-click the Command Prompt window's title bar then select Properties. In the box that opens, select the 'Enable Ctrl key shortcuts' option. This lets you copy and paste text using the Ctrl+C and Ctrl+V keyboard shortcuts – handy if you're copying command lines from a web page. Click the Font tab to change the size of the text and the style of font used. You can make the text larger if you're having trouble reading it.

Also useful is the Colours tab, which lets you customise the colour of the background and text. The Opacity slider at the bottom lets you make the entire window semi-transparent. Click OK.



Open Command Prompt by clicking Start, typing cmd and pressing Enter

CUSTOMISE THE TASKBAR

1 DITCH UNNECESSARY ICONS

Click Start, Settings, System, then 'Notifications & actions'. Click 'Select which icons appear on the taskbar' to switch on or off the icons that are permanently displayed in the notification area.

2 SET THE TASKBAR TO AUTO-HIDE

Right-click the taskbar, then select Properties. On the Taskbar tab, put a tick in the box next to 'Auto-hide the taskbar'. Move your mouse to the bottom of the screen to make it pop up again.

3 MAKE THE TASKBAR BIGGER

Right-click the taskbar and make sure 'Lock the taskbar' isn't ticked. Then move your mouse pointer to the top edge of the taskbar until it becomes a double-headed arrow. Click and drag to increase the taskbar's depth. Lock the taskbar again when you're done.

4 FIT MORE SHORTCUTS

Right-click the taskbar, select Properties, then tick the box next to 'Use small taskbar buttons' – shrinking these will let you fit more shortcuts. The Search bar will disappear but you can still click Start, then search by typing.

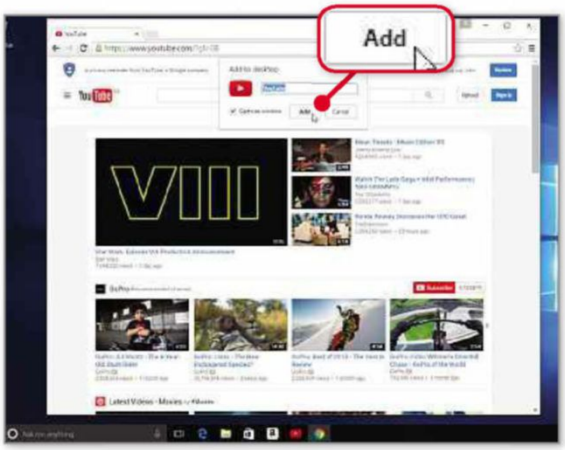
5 MOVE THE TASKBAR

You don't have to stick with the taskbar at the bottom of the screen. Right-click it, select Properties, then choose Left, Right or Top from the 'Taskbar location on screen' dropdown menu.

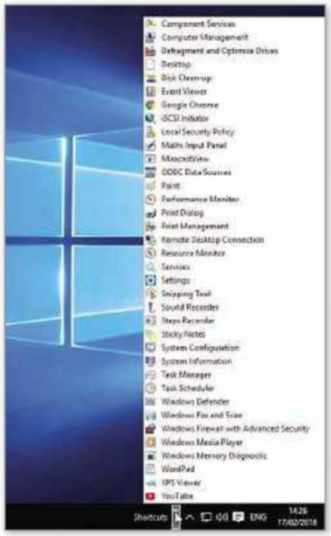
HACK WINDOWS 10 TO MAKE IT BETTER

22 Turn any website into a Windows 10 app

This hack makes use of a feature in Chrome that lets you convert websites into app-like shortcuts that you can add to your taskbar or Start menu. Install Chrome from www.google.com/chrome if you don't already have it, then open the browser and navigate to the site you want to convert. Click the top-right menu button (three horizontal lines), then select 'More tools', 'Add to desktop' (this may apppear as 'Add to taskbar'). In the small window that opens, give your app a name, make sure the 'Open as window' option is ticked, then click Add (see screenshot right). Now right-click on the new desktop icon that appears, then select 'Pin to taskbar'. Whenever you click your new taskbar icon, your website will open in its own window, just like an app.



If you use Chrome, it's easy to turn a website into a Windows 10 app

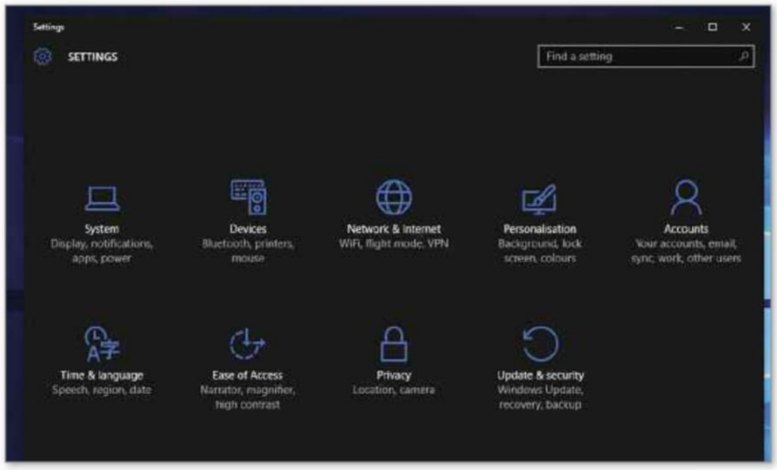


You can create a toolbar of shortcuts to appear when you right-click the taskbar

23 Unlock Windows 10's secret 'dark' mode

Windows 10 has a hidden 'dark' theme that you may like (some people think it adds a touch of class to the operating system - see screenshot below). To activate it, you need to hack the Registry, so don't try this unless you're comfortable with that, and make sure you back up first. If you're happy to proceed, click Start, type regedit and press Enter. When the Registry Editor opens, navigate to **HKEY_CURRENT_USER\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Themes\Personalize**. Right-click a blank space on the right of the window and select New, then 'DWORD (32-bit) Value'. A new value will appear with its name highlighted in blue. Type AppsUseLightTheme to rename it. Now close the Registry Editor, log out of your user account, then log back into Windows.

Not all apps will work with the dark theme, but many will, including the Settings app. To switch back, navigate to the AppsUseLightTheme Value in the Registry Editor, right-click it and select Modify. Change the 'Value data' to 1, then click OK. Log out and in again.



Like this 'dark' mode? Hack the Registry to activate it

24 Create a toolbar of shortcuts

Open File Explorer, navigate to your Documents folder, then create a new folder. Name it 'Shortcuts'. Now open a second File Explorer window and navigate to C:\ProgramData\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs. Work your way through the folders to select any programs and tools that you want to add to your toolbar. In each case, right-click the icon, select Copy, then right-click in your empty Shortcuts folder and select Paste – don't drag and drop anything. You can add shortcuts for anything to your folder – programs, web pages, files and more.

When you're done, right-click the taskbar and select Toolbars, then 'New toolbar'. In the window that opens, navigate to your Shortcuts folder, then click 'Select folder'. You should see the word Shortcuts towards the right of your taskbar – click the double arrow next to it to see all your shortcuts in a menu. ca

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The secret signs to look out for

Plus
- **Block The Windows 10 Upgrade** Stop Microsoft forcing it on to your PC
- **Run Windows 3.1 In Your Browser** Who needs Windows 10.1?!

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Abandoned software: is it safe to use?

Software can become unsafe to use when its developers stop supporting it. But some programs are more dangerous than others. **Michael Britton** reveals the security risks

In many ways, a favourite PC program has much in common with your oldest, comfiest pair of slippers – quick to slip into, almost always within arm's reach, but unfortunately, not without the odd hole.

The solution to both a hole in your slippers and in your software is pretty much the same: a patch. But what if your favourite program is no longer being patched by its programmer? And that hole is therefore getting bigger by the day?

Perhaps the highest profile example of recent times is that of Windows XP. When Microsoft ended support for the operating system in April 2014, it instantly became a prime target for hackers. It will never receive another security update, but debates still rage about whether you can use it safely (see page 60).

XP may be the best-known casualty in recent times, but there are scores of other popular programs whose loss of support hasn't received that level of publicity. So here we highlight a few of these, and reveal whether it's safe to keep using them, and which alternatives are available if not.

Microsoft Money

Abandoned on 31 January, 2011

Launched in 1991 for Windows 3.0, Microsoft Money gave users advanced tools to help them keep on top of their finances. Its popularity rocketed four years later when Microsoft renamed it Money 95 and, for two months, made it available as a free download. Microsoft stopped selling it in June 2009, and ended support 18 months later. It was replaced by Money Plus Sunset, which brought together tools from the entire series of Money programs (read more on Microsoft's site: www.snipca.com/19606).

Security risk: Low

The biggest danger of running Money after January 2011 would have been using it to access online services. Thankfully, Microsoft did the decent thing and removed this function, making it safe to use Money on your desktop. It even works on Windows 10, as many *of our* readers have told us by email.

Try this instead: GnuCash

www.gnucash.org

It may sound like a payday loan company, but free program GnuCash has been providing very powerful accountancy tools since launching in 1998. If you find it a little complicated, try BudgetSimple (www.budgetsimple.com) instead. There's a 'Plus' upgrade for $4.99 (£3.45) a month, but we recommend sticking with the free Basic version.

TrueCrypt

http://truecrypt.sourceforge.net

Abandoned on 28 May, 2014

For 10 years after it launched in 2004 TrueCrypt let you encrypt files, partitions and entire drives. But in May 2014 the TrueCrypt Foundation unexpectedly announced that it would stop developing the program, and would leave security flaws unfixed (see screenshot below). Its reason was that Microsoft had ended support for XP a month earlier, and that file-encryption tools were built into Windows 7 and 8. This didn't convince some sceptics, who accused the US National Security Agency (NSA) of forcing TrueCrypt to close because terrorists were using it to encrypt files.

Security risk: High

Whatever the truth behind TrueCrypt's closure (frankly, the conspiracy theory seems unlikely), it's no longer safe to use. Google's security team identified even more flaws in September 2015. It's just not worth the risk.

Try this instead: VeraCrypt

https://veracrypt.codeplex.com

When support ended, TrueCrypt's developers left instructions on the program's website for moving your files to Microsoft's BitLocker. But we'd suggest

TrueCrypt's developers make it very clear that their software is no longer safe to use

Winamp says there's more "coming soon", but we'll believe it when llamas learn to fly

an alternative. BitLocker is a good way to encrypt files, but it's available only in the Professional, Enterprise and Ultimate editions of Windows. Microsoft thinks it's a good enough product to tempt users into upgrading from the Home version.

We recommend the free VeraCrypt, which has been built from the same code as TrueCrypt. It's not the only encryption software based on TrueCrypt, but it does receive the most security updates, with the most recent arriving on 13 February.

Winamp

www.winamp.com

Abandoned on 20 December, 2013

For many years after its launch in 1997, and particularly after AOL bought it in 1999, Winamp was one of the best ways to play music. The program made it very easy to create playlists from MP3s. But then along came music-streaming services like Spotify, which provided the kind of convenience Winamp couldn't compete with. In December 2013, AOL said it would close Winamp, but a month later sold it to Radionomy, a hub for internet radio. There have been no developments since. Visit Winamp's website (see screenshot above) and all you see is a lonely llama and the promise of "more coming soon".

Security risk: Low

Winamp is still supported, but there's no sign of a new version. Until one appears, it's probably best to leave it alone. There are lots of good alternatives.

Try this instead: MusicBee

http://getmusicbee.com

A flexible, free music player with all kinds of useful options for setting up playlists and more.

Microsoft Security Essentials

Abandoned for XP on 15 July, 2015

For a few years after launching in 2009, Microsoft Security Essentials (MSE) offered protection for Windows XP, Vista and 7. But it was replaced by Windows Defender in Windows 8, and the XP version no longer receives security updates.

Security risk: High

In September 2013, Microsoft said that MSE offers only "baseline" support. That came as no surprise to us because the program had often performed poorly in the antivirus tests carried out by Dennis Technology Labs. Even before Microsoft ended support for MSE in XP we had been advising you not to use it.

Try this instead:

Kaspersky Internet Security

Microsoft may want you to use Windows Defender, which works in Windows 10 (www.snipca.com/19599) as well as in 8, but you should really stick with one of the specialist antivirus companies. Kaspersky has been the best performer in our tests over the past few years (see our exclusive Reader Offer on page 68), but there are good free alternatives too, such as Avast (www.avast.com).

CHEERIO TO GOOGLE'S PICASA

Just as we were putting the finishing touches to this feature Google announced that it would soon stop supporting its photo-sharing and editing service Picasa. The company said on its blog that the decision followed "much thought and consideration", but we think Picasa was doomed the moment that Google Photos (https://photos.google.com) launched last year. Fortunately, Picasa's passing won't have catastrophic consequences. If you have a Picasa web album, you can also access it in Google Photos.

The important dates to scribble down are 15 March, when Google will end support for the downloadable Desktop version of Picasa; and 1 May, when Picasa's web albums will close. Read Google's blog for more information: www.snipca.com/19642.

Windows Media Centre

Abandoned on 2 May, 2015

Letting you stream videos, music, photos and even live TV from your PC to any other connected computer or TV in your home, Windows Media Centre (WMC) was great in its prime. However in 2009 Microsoft moved the WMC team on to other projects, and from that moment its days were numbered. It was officially killed off in May 2015 when Microsoft said it wouldn't be in Windows 10. When a PC upgrades from Windows 7/8 to 10, WMC is removed during installation.

Security risk: Medium

Media centres involve opening your PC up to traffic from other PCs in order to function. While it's unlikely that a well-protected home network could be hacked from a media server alone, we'd advise against using an unsupported one.

Try this instead: Plex (https://plex.tv)

Plex is a fantastic media centre that can stream video, music and photos from your PC to a connected smart TV or internet TV box.

LimeWire

www.freelimewiredownload.net

Abandoned on 27 October, 2010

At its peak LimeWire was one of the world's most popular peer-to-peer file-sharing programs. It became a victim of its own success in 2010, when US record labels took the program's developers to court, accusing them of encouraging people to illegally share music. A US judge ordered LimeWire to disable all "searching, downloading, uploading, file-trading and/or file distribution functionality", effectively killing the service.

Security risk: High

You can still use early versions of LimeWire, but it's not a good idea. Unsupported programs are always risky, but file-sharing tools especially so because you run a high chance of downloading malware. If it's still lurking on your PC forgotten, uninstall it now.

Try this instead: WeTransfer.com

https://www.wetransfer.com

WeTransfer offers a much safer way of sharing large files - up to 2GB without even registering. Just upload a file, then email a secure link. ca

Are XP users **PC dinosaurs?**

It's the debate that's been raging on our Letters page – does using XP mean you're stuck in the Jurassic era? Not even *Computeractive*'s writers can agree...

Over the past few months nothing has triggered more controversy on our Letters pages than whether you should continue to use Windows XP. Those against the 14-year-old operating system (OS) say that its diehards are stuck in the past (about 100 million years in the past, give or take several millennia). But XP's loyal fans passionately defend it by insisting it still does everything they want it to. They argue that with the right security software installed, it's safe to run XP.

So which is it? Are XP users the "dinosaurs" that its detractors claim? Or is that an insult to the millions of people who continue to use it? Two *Computeractive* writers join the debate...

Yes, says Barry Collins

Windows XP was a monumentally good operating system, arguably Microsoft's best ever. But in the same way Bobby Charlton was a monumentally good footballer, you wouldn't want him sitting behind Wayne Rooney in England's midfield now.

> An XP computer will soon resemble a time machine, running only the software we used to run 10 years ago

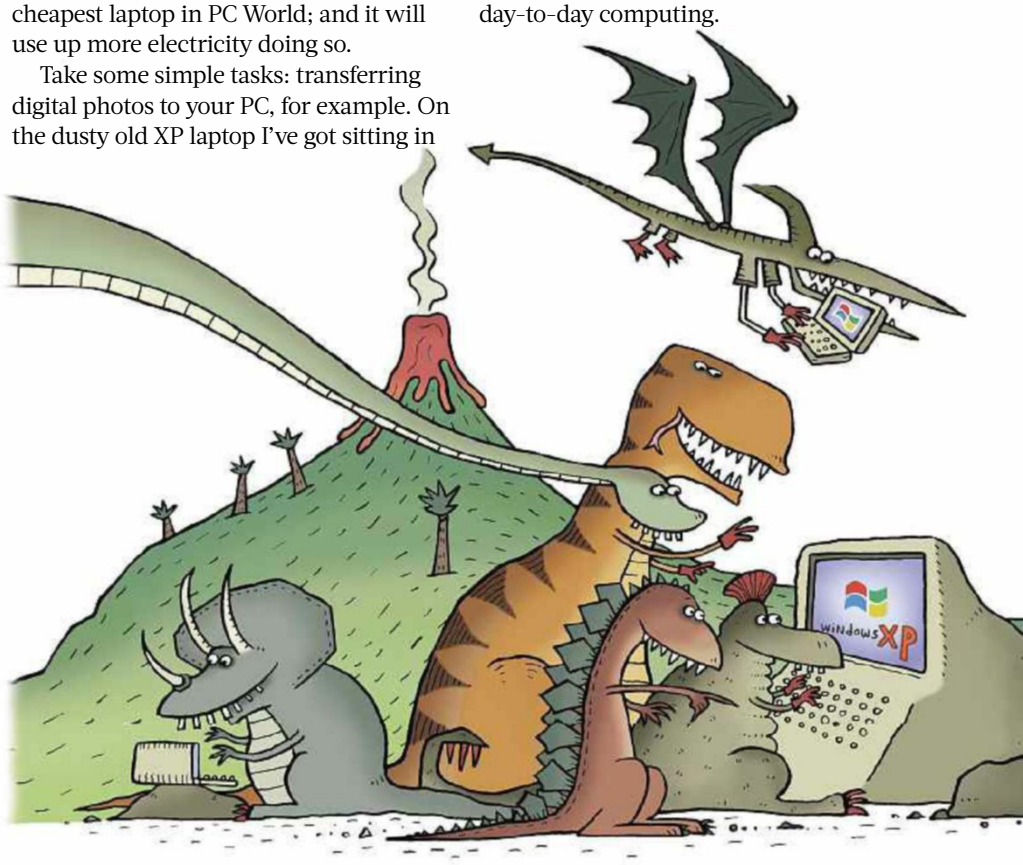
XP hasn't received a single new feature in seven years; it hasn't been patched for even the most serious of security flaws in almost two years. At this point most XP users shrug their shoulders and claim: "I haven't been infected by a virus". To which I'd respond: how the hell do you know? Today's malware doesn't draw attention to itself. It sits there in the background, quietly pilfering logins and credit-card details, or using your PC to attack others. Your security problem is *our* security problem.

Even if you're not persuaded that your Windows XP system is an accident waiting to happen, you're missing out on so much. Barely any software released today continues to support XP. Even the Chrome browser, which Google kept supporting on Windows XP purely to undermine Microsoft, is being discontinued on XP come April. A Windows XP computer will soon resemble a time machine, running only the software we used to run 10 years ago.

Yet, the biggest reason for discarding XP isn't the operating system itself, but the hardware underneath it. A PC running Windows XP is likely to be a decade old. It might still switch on every morning, but it's incredibly inefficient. It takes five minutes to become operable; it performs at a fraction of the speed of even the cheapest laptop in PC World; and it will use up more electricity doing so.

Take some simple tasks: transferring digital photos to your PC, for example. On the dusty old XP laptop I've got sitting in my office, it took 38 minutes to shift 110 photos via a USB 2.0 port to the sluggish old hard drive. The same process took less than two minutes on my three-year-old Lenovo laptop, which has a USB 3.0 connection and an SSD. And I could carry on working on my PC while it did so, unlike on my crippled XP machine.

Processing power has made leaps and bounds since XP. You could buy a £200 laptop that has 10 times the processing muscle of an XP PC, and many times the memory. It will connect to your Wi-Fi at maximum speed, not at the stuttery rates of 2005's processors. It comes with antivirus, backup and cloud storage built in. You don't need to sell a kidney to upgrade to a system that will fundamentally transform your day-to-day computing.



You could plod on with your XP system, like those stubborn residents who refuse to sell their house to developers while the tower blocks go up around them. Or you could accept that Windows XP has already had a bloody good innings and pack it off into retirement, before your hard drive (inevitably) packs in and you're forced to upgrade anyway.

No, says Ken Rigsby...

XP users are dinosaurs only in the same way that dinosaurs were dinosaurs. Let me explain what I mean by that.

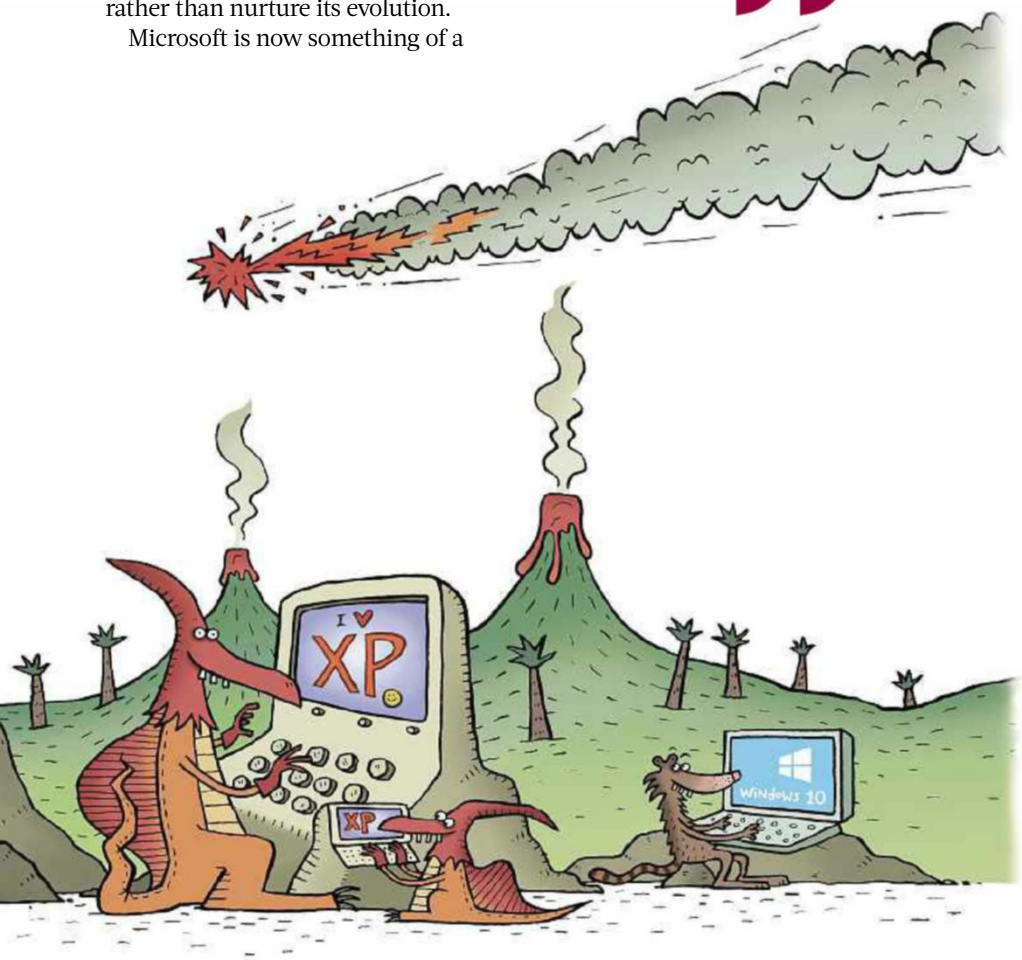
If you wanted to be in with the in-crowd 65 million years ago, dinosaurs were where it was at. Dinosaurs ruled the world. And then, all of a sudden, thanks to a giant asteroid, they didn't. Overnight, all they knew was rendered worthless. Dinosaurs were still great, but their world had become terrible. It wasn't that they couldn't adapt, more that they weren't given the chance. That's why it's unfair to use the word 'dinosaur' as a metaphor for something old-fashioned and perceived to be rubbish.

XP didn't succumb to the same violent extinction as our prehistoric friends, so that's where my analogy falls down. Microsoft chose to ignore XP to death rather than nurture its evolution.

Microsoft is now something of a technology underdog. But back when it decided we should all move on from XP, it had huge resources and was awash with programming talent. It could have put both to good use by continuing to develop XP, keeping it as the key brand for its operating system, just as Apple has stuck with 'OS X' since 2001 (the same year XP was released). Quite simply, Microsoft could have made things better gradually, instead of enacting cataclysmic change.

It tried the gradual approach up to a point. For many people, Windows 7 was like a better XP. It fixed many of XP's faults and added some great new features, all without fundamentally changing how Windows works. Then came Windows 8 – the operating system that put the LOL into lolloping.

> "It's unfair to use the word 'dinosaur' as a metaphor for something old-fashioned"



WINDOWS XP: THE FACTS

- Codenamed Whistler, it launched in October 2001 to generally positive reviews
- The 2002 Service Pack fixed over 300 problems (listed at www.snipca.com/19596)
- At its peak in 2007, 83 per cent of computers worldwide ran XP
- Windows 7 usage overtook XP in October 2011
- Microsoft ended security support for XP in April 2014
- XP is currently the third most-used version of Windows, with 11.5 per cent (around 200 million PCs)

And now there's Windows 10. The new operating system is basically a Windows 8 fancy dress party with the best bits of Windows XP/7 invited, on the proviso they wear the emperor's new clothes. Because let's face it - while it's great to have the Start menu back, Windows 10's interface is basically a pug-ugly, unplayable version of Tetris. It's filled with colourful, rotating distractions and – just when you think you've figured it out – the squares shift around to put you in a panic. It's nauseating.

Microsoft has said there will be no Windows 11 because its focus is on improving 10 for ever. Its first step was to bring back the Start menu. People love that, so Windows 10 is flying off the virtual shelves and succeeding in part because it's now a bit more like XP. And when Microsoft makes Windows 10's woeful Mail app a bit more like XP's Outlook Express, we'll be another step closer to that great operating system.

It's taken Microsoft 15 years to understand what Apple figured out in 2001. When people love something, don't change it suddenly. Don't attempt to wipe out their world. Instead, just make things better bit by bit. If Microsoft had done that, we'd all still be using XP - and proud to call ourselves dinosaurs. ca

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR OLD XP PC

In Issues 446 to 449 we ran a four-part series explaining how you can breathe new life into your old XP computer. You can read this on our new 2015 Back Issue CD, on sale now: ww.snipca.com/19124.

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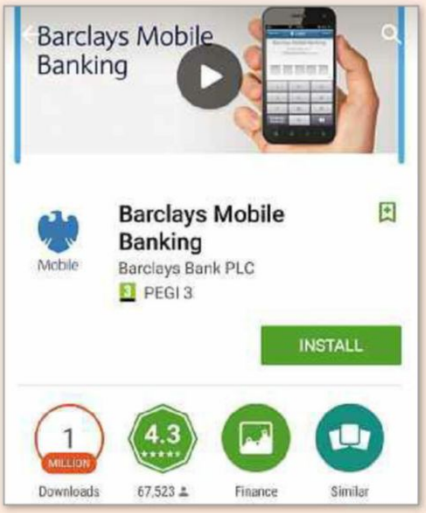
Problems Solved

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

How do I make the Barclays app work?

Q I downloaded the Barclays Mobile Banking app to my Samsung Galaxy S2 smartphone a few years back, and I've been using it all that time without problems. Recently, I tried to download the latest update, but was told 'Your device isn't compatible with this version'. I contacted Barclays support and was told to delete the old app so I could download the new one, but I couldn't! Later, I was told I should've kept the old app, but that I'd be sent links to an update – but these were all for the latest version. Barclays then referred me to Samsung, who said it could do nothing as my phone's Android version was up to my service provider, O2. O2 said it couldn't help and that Barclays should send me a link to the old version. Barclays said that 'downgrades' were against company policy. What's going on and how do I fix it?

Peter Williams



Update your device's software to use the latest version of the Barclays app

A The latest version of the Barclays mobile app now requires at least Android 4.0 (KitKat), but from the supporting information you supplied we know that your Galaxy S2 smartphone is still on 2.3 (Gingerbread). This is the root cause of your problem.

You'd expect a global financial institution to keep its app up to date, and that's what Barclays does. The older version of the bank's app still worked because you hadn't updated it beyond the version that supports Gingerbread. You hadn't done so because Google's Play store doesn't allow it to happen. However, by deleting the outdated Barclays app, you have effectively permanently cut yourself off from that version because Barclays no longer offers the older edition for download. It's the latest version or nothing.

The solution is to update your phone to a later version of Android, so you can use the latest Barclays app. Mobile-network operators, including O2, work in conjunction with smartphone manufacturers to create updates for their various devices. Most updates are delivered 'over the air' (OTA), meaning you can download them directly to your phone and have it update itself. The latest available of Android will depend on whatever agreement O2 has with Samsung for particular phones. For yours, we think that's Android 4.0 (Ice Cream Sandwich) – and the Barclays app still works with that.

Make sure your S2 is connected to Wi-Fi then, from the home screen, tap Settings followed by 'About phone' and then 'Software update'. Now tap Update (or 'Check For Update') and follow the prompts. It could take an hour or more to download and apply the update. You'll probably need to repeat the process several times, because it's unlikely that you'll be offered a direct update to Android 4.0 – you'll need to update through several versions.

Finally, just launch the Play Store, search for the Barclays app, tap Install and follow the prompts.

What's eating my internet allowance?

Q Our package with BT gives us 10GB per month, which has been satisfactory for some time. Lately BT has been telling us that we're over the usage limit, and charging extra accordingly. Our usage is mainly emails with a few hours per week of web browsing. No large uploads or downloads. What could be causing this?

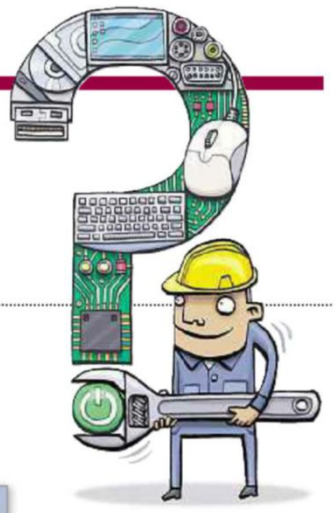
Tommy Matches

A Have you upgraded to Windows 10? Microsoft's new operating system updates itself automatically. It downloads updates in the background, and without you knowing. These updates can be tens or even hundreds of megabytes, so they're the prime suspect in the case of your disappearing allowance.

You might know that Windows 10 forces you to update, so you can't avoid these downloads indefinitely. However, there is a way to delay them until you're ready. Click Start followed by Settings, then 'Network & internet', followed by WiFi. Next, click 'Advanced options' and move the 'Metered connection' switch to On.

Then, if you have a laptop, take it to a coffee shop or a friend's house and make use of their unmetered Wi-Fi connection to download the updates. Follow this tip again to disable the 'Metered connection' option, then return to Settings and click 'Update & recovery' to watch the updates' download progress.

Move the 'Metered connection' switch to On to delay any Windows 10 upadates



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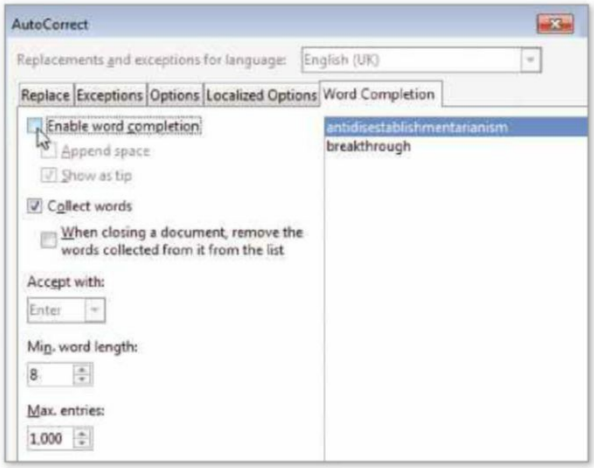
How do I stop LibreOffice second-guessing my typing?

Q Rather than spend money upgrading my old Office 2003 suite I decided to give the latest version of LibreOffice (www.libreoffice.org) a whirl. I'm very pleasantly surprised by how good it is, but there's one increasing annoyance: when I'm creating documents in Writer, sometimes when I press Enter the last word I typed is changed. For example, if I type 'break' at the end of a line and then press Enter, Writer changes it to 'breakthrough'. This doesn't happen with every word, and only if I press Enter without a full stop. However, as I create company memos with bullet points at the top, it affects me on a regular basis. It also seems to be getting worse, with more and more common words being changed when I press Enter. It's not quite become unusable yet, but I need to understand what's going on and how to stop it. Over to you!

Jonathan Chan



Open the Tools menu, select AutoCorrect and make the required changes to stop or tweak LibreOffice Word Completion

A What's going on is that Writer has a feature called Word Completion, which is preconfigured to 'collect' longer words as you type. These collected words are added to Writer's database. The intention is to speed up typing, because longer words can be completed automatically by typing just a part of the word – with Enter being the default trigger to tell Writer to execute the completion. Incidentally, if you look closely, while you type you'll notice that Writer pops up a little floating alert above words it intends to auto-complete.

Stopping or tweaking the way Word Completion works is easy. First, open the Tools menu and choose AutoCorrect. Now select the Word Completion tab.

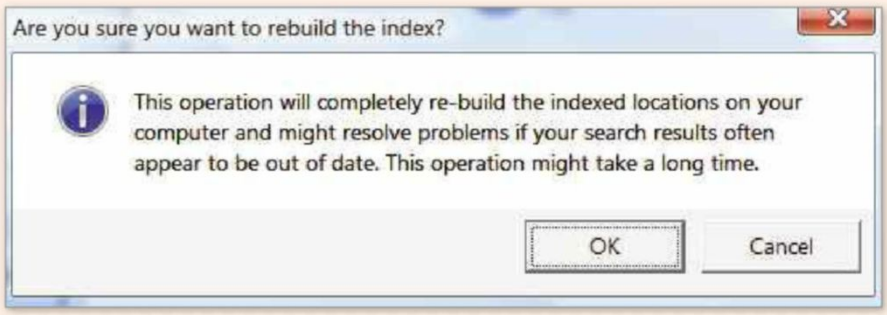
If you wish simply to disable the feature, then untick the 'Enable word completion' box. However, you could also make it work for you by tweaking the options. For example, you could choose a trigger other than Enter – pick Tab or Right from the 'Accept with' dropdown menu. Do this and pressing Tab or the right cursor (arrow) will complete words.

Alternatively – or as well – increase the figure in 'Min. word length', so that Word Completion works only on very long words. That can be really helpful if you use lengthy, specialist terms in your documents.

How do I fix my Windows search?

Q I have a Windows 7 and an older Vista computer. I use the Vista PC as a backup for my old documents, because it is up to the job. For years I've relied on the Start menu search box to find documents, either by name or contents. Recently, though, it's just stopped working. No matter what I type, it won't show any results. Everything else with the computer seems okay, so I have no idea how this might've happened. Is there a way to fix it?

Anthony Booth



Instruct Windows to rebuild the index to fix a corrupted Start menu search box

A It sounds like the index file that Windows relies upon to serve up its search result has become corrupted. The index is in near-constant use, so an unexpected shutdown could've caused this – during a power cut, say.

The fix is to instruct Windows to rebuild its index: this will take many hours or even days to complete, but it happens in the background so you can continue using the PC in the meantime.

Click Start followed by Control Panel, and then 'System and Maintenance', followed by Indexing Options. Check that the entries under Included Locations are correct. If not, click Modify and then tick or clear the location boxes as appropriate – then click OK. Now click the Advanced button followed by Rebuild. Click Yes to confirm, and then Windows will get on with the job.

Problems Solved

What happened to my Google page?

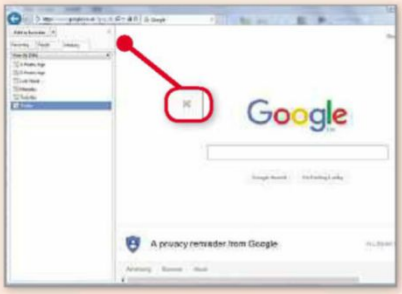
Q My Google web page has moved to the right, which has hidden access to the control functions. It seems to have happened yesterday after my seven-year-old grandson had been showing me what he had learnt at school. Now I don't know how to shift everything back to the left. Can you help?

Ian Bridges

A You didn't tell us which web browser you're using, but we have a strong hunch that it's Internet Explorer (IE), with the Google search page set as your home page. What your grandson probably did was to summon one of the three Explorer bars, which occupy a column on the left-hand side. One side-effect of these bars is that they reduce the size of the browsing window on the right.

Explorer bars are removed instantly by clicking the cross at the top-right of the bar but, as this is both tiny and coloured grey (on a grey background), it's easy to miss.

And, if you're wondering how your grandson did this in the first place, it was either via menus or keyboard shortcuts. Press Alt to reveal IE's menu bar, then click View, point to 'Explorer bars' and then click to enable or remove the bars. Alternatively, use the keyboard shortcuts Control (Ctrl)+Shift+I, Ctrl+Shift+H or Ctrl+Shift+G respectively to summon or suppress the Favorites, History or Feeds bars.

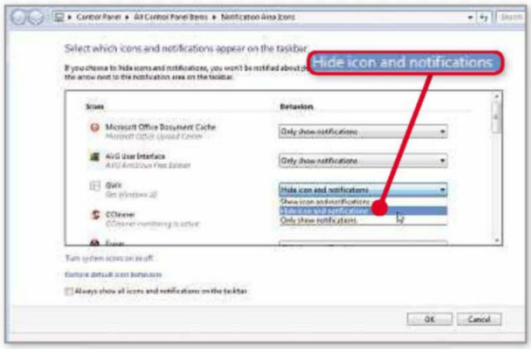


Click the grey X to remove the Favorites, History and Feeds bars

Why does Windows 10 keep telling me my PC is incompatible?

Q I am happy with Windows 7 because it does all I need. However, a window keeps popping up to say that my computer is not compatible with Windows 10. My copy of Windows 7 is genuine, so why would this happen? I do not want to change to Windows 10, but I'm just curious.

Bernie Collins



Select 'Hide icon and notifications' to prevent messages about your PC's incompatibility with Windows 10

A This is the work of the infamous Get Windows 10 ('GWX') tool that Microsoft has pushed on to millions of PCs around the world. It's nothing sinister, and it in no way indicates that your copy of Windows 7 is not genuine.

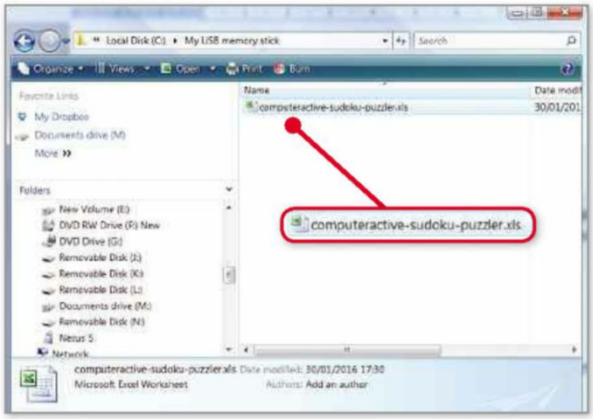
In your case, GWX is not so much urging you to upgrade as telling you that you can't – but with a link to click through to buy a new Windows 10 PC. Instead, you can find out why your current PC isn't compatible by clicking the 'View report' link.

But in your case GWX is just an unwelcome annoyance. Fortunately, it's easily silenced. Right-click on a blank part of the notification area, at the far-right of the Windows Taskbar, and choose 'Customize notification icons'. Clear the tick from 'Always show all icons and notifications on the taskbar'. Now scroll the list to find Get Windows 10 (GWX) then, from the dropdown menu to its right, choose 'Hide icon and notifications'. Click OK to finish.

How do I move your Sudoku app to a new PC?

Q I have an old program called Computeractive Sudoku Puzzler, downloaded from your old website years ago. I use it every day, and would like to use it on another computer. Can you explain how to do this?

Ronald Mayne



Copy the Computeractive Sudoku Puzzler file to a USB memory stick if you want to move it to a new computer

A Goodness, that takes us back – to December 2005. That's when we created our Sudoku game, and put it up as a free download.

It can sometimes be tricky to get older programs to work on newer versions of Windows, but here the vintage doesn't matter, because our tool was just a clever Excel spreadsheet. As long as the second computer has Excel installed – or a compatible spreadsheet program, such as the free LibreOffice Calc from www.snipca.com/19494 – all you need to do is copy the file across and double-click to launch it.

Press Windows key+E to open Windows Explorer, copy the file (our original was called 'computeractive-sudoku-puzzler.xls') to a USB memory stick and then just move to your second computer and use Windows Explorer to copy it across.

Can I email groups with W10 Mail?

Q Windows 10 has some nice features, but the Mail app doesn't seem as good as Windows Live Mail. For example, I cannot find how to send a group mail. Perhaps I am missing something?

Robin Davis

A You're not missing anything: the new Mail app doesn't have the ability to email to groups. Microsoft might add the feature later, but right now the only way to properly use groups is by using a different email tool, such as Windows Live Mail.

However, there is a workaround, of sorts. First, launch the People app and then create a new record, by clicking the plus ('+') next to Contacts. Give it a fitting name (such as 'MyGroup') and then click in the 'Personal email' field below. Now type your group's individual email addresses, separating each with a comma (such as 'emailladdress1@somewhereorother.com, emailladdress2@somewhereorother.com, emailladdress3@somewhereorother.com' and so on). When you're done, click the Save button – the floppy disk icon.

Use the People app and type your group's individual email addresses to send emails to groups with the Windows 10 Mail app

To send an email to this group, select it in the list below Contacts, then click the list of email addresses under 'Email Personal', on the right. Windows will ask which app you want to use: choose Mail, tick 'Always use this app', then click OK.

Mail will launch with the individual email address populated in the To field. Sadly you can't summon the group by typing its name directly into the To field, so you'll always have to do this from People.

How do I save my Hotmail emails?

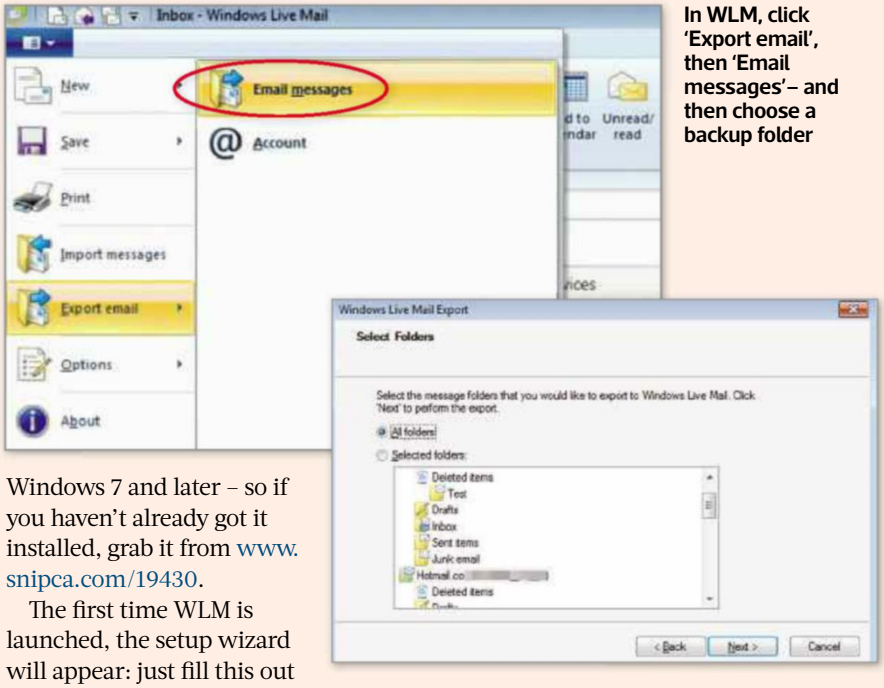
Q I use Hotmail and sort my emails into many folders. I would like to keep a copy of these emails on an external drive, so that there is no danger of losing them. I have asked a lot of apparently knowledgeable people, but no-one seems to have an answer. Do you?

Roland Whitehall

A Yes, but first understand that you're actually now using Outlook.com, as Microsoft has renamed the service. Your @hotmail.com email address will continue to work, though.

Next, you need to set up a desktop email program to synchronise the emails: this will create a copy of the emails on your PC's hard drive, so you'll be able to read them without logging into Outlook.com.

You didn't tell us which version of Windows you're using, but modern email tools all work in much the same way. Microsoft's Windows Live Mail (WLM) tool is free, and compatible with Windows 7 and later – so if you haven't already got it installed, grab it from www.snipca.com/19430.



In WLM, click 'Export email', then 'Email messages'– and then choose a backup folder

The first time WLM is launched, the setup wizard will appear: just fill this out using your existing Outlook.com login credentials (when asked for an email address, supply your @hotmail.com one). WLM will now synchronise with Outlook.com, and download local copies of your messages.

You effectively now have a backup of your Outlook.com messages, stored on the same drive on which WLM is installed. To create a second backup on your external drive, click the down arrow to open WLM's main menu, then point to 'Export email' and click 'Email messages'. Select 'Microsoft Windows Live Mail', click Next followed by Browse. Then choose a folder for the backup, click Next, choose the 'All folders' button and click Next.

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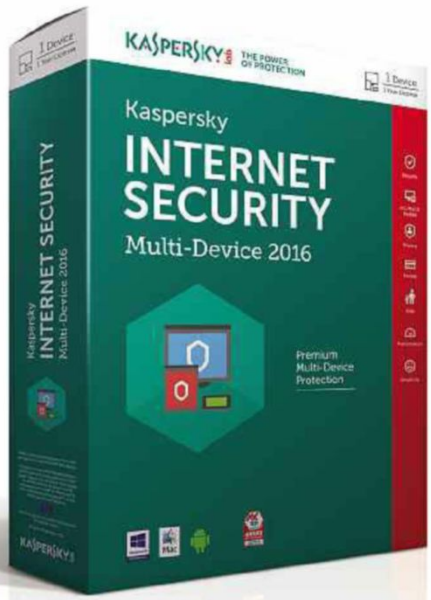

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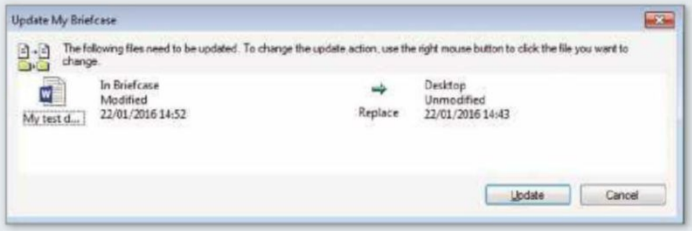
Whatever happened to... Briefcase?

Q When I worked full-time years ago, I used Microsoft Briefcase to keep my work documents synchronised between my office and home XP computers, via a floppy disk of all things. Now I'm using a new Windows 10 laptop and use a USB stick to copy files to my old Windows 7 PC. I wanted to use Briefcase but it's not in Windows 10 – and I'm wondering what happened to it.

Patrick Marsden



Briefcase can be revived in Windows 10 using a convoluted Registry hack

A Briefcase was sidelined (or 'deprecated') by Microsoft, becoming hidden in Windows 7, and then dropped from Windows 8.1 and Windows 10. This is partly because by the time Windows 7 arrived, in 2009, Microsoft thought that the very idea of a briefcase had become a little old fashioned. But it also reflected the fact that during the intervening years many free and better alternatives had emerged, including several from Microsoft.

The web service OneDrive, for example, is now built into Windows 10. Services like this make synchronisation incredibly simple, assuming your various devices have internet connections. They also work over home networks.

It's actually possible to revive Briefcase in Windows 10. The process involves a convoluted Registry hack, but Briefcase enthusiasts have made a downloadable .reg file that does the job automatically. Back up your Registry, then download 'Add_Briefcase_to_New_context_menu.reg' from www.snipca.com/19443. Next, just double-click it and click Yes to allow it to run. Now restart your PC. To create a new Briefcase, right-click on the Desktop (or in File Explorer), point to New and then click Briefcase. It works with USB memory sticks, so there's no need to worry about floppies.

Alternatively, if you want something more modern, but not reliant on the internet, then try GoodSync (www.goodsync.com). The free version does place some limits on the number of files and folders that can be synced, but it's fine for light use. Just use the left and right Browse buttons to select the sync folders then, when you want to sync, click Analyze, followed by Sync.

Want to know what happened to your favourite program, website or technology? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Why does Windows 10 make my PC start itself?

Q I upgraded my desktop computer from Windows 8.1 to Windows 10, following advice in your magazine. The upgrade went fine. The only problem I have found is that it'll sometimes start up again perhaps 30 to 45 minutes after shutting down. The only way I can find to stop this is to shut down normally and then switch off at the wall socket. If I then turn the power back on at the wall socket, the computer does not start itself at any time – until I boot it up myself. Any advice you can offer would be gratefully appreciated.

David Phillips

To disable 'WoL' click the Power Management tab then untick 'Allow this device...'

A There's a feature built into most modern network cards called 'Wake on LAN' (or 'WoL'), which enables other devices connected to the same network to tell a PC to power itself up. But this only works in a certain power state (technically known as 'S5', or a 'soft off'). When you switch your PC off at the mains, you force it to enter a different power state (known as a 'mechanical off'), which also powers down the WoL ability.

We don't know why the upgrade from Windows 8.1 to 10 would've suddenly caused your PC's WoL to become problematic in S5 mode, but we imagine you need updated drivers. Press Windows key+X then click Device Manager. Next, double-click 'Network adapters', right-click your PC's network card and choose Properties. Select the Driver tab, then click Update Driver and follow the prompts.

If that doesn't help, disable the feature – it doesn't sound like you use it anyway. Repeat the above, but this time choose the Power Management tab. Clear the tick from the 'Allow this device to wake the computer' box and click OK.

NEXT ISSUE

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BIOS

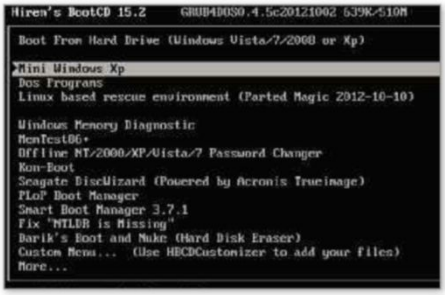
Access the BIOS in Windows 10, decode boot beeps and reset corrupted settings

No operating system found

If the BIOS says it can't find Windows, then it's one of two things: very bad news or nothing to worry about. If pressing a key clears the message and leads to a normal launch, then your PC is trying to boot from a CD or DVD. Simply eject the disc or access the BIOS to rearrange the order of locations from where your PC boots (see screenshot right).

To access the BIOS press F2 or Delete (Del) or similar then look for the boot options. Use the cursor (arrow) keys and Enter to place the CD or DVD drive below the hard drive that contains Windows. Press Escape (Esc) and then choose Save. If this doesn't solve your problem, then your hard drive might be faulty. Use Hiren's BootCD tool (www.snipca.com/19459) on another PC to create a CD that'll let you boot without Windows.

Insert the CD you've created into your PC. Use the cursor (arrow) keys and Enter to select 'Mini Windows Xp' (see screenshot below). When it launches, double-click HBCD Menu, then click Programs followed by Testing. These utilities will help you diagnose your hard-drive problem: choose HDD Scan, select the problematic drive and then click the 'S.M.A.R.T.' button for a report.



Your PC won't boot past BIOS? Use Hiren's BootCD to launch rescue tools

No BIOS key message

On booting up, most PCs display a message to let you know which key to press to access the BIOS. However, not all PCs do this and those that do flash the notification quite fleetingly. If you're using a new PC running Windows 8.1 or 10, skip to the next tip. But, if you're using an older version of Windows – or you upgraded to Windows 10 from Windows 7 – then the keys you need to try are F2, Delete (Del) and F10: just keep tapping them from the moment you switch on.

In the BIOS you change the order of locations from where your PC boots

Can't access BIOS on new PC

Worried that your new PC is faulty because pressing F2 or Delete doesn't access the BIOS? That's because the traditional BIOS has been replaced by something called the Unified Extensible Firmware Interface, or UEFI. No two UEFIs are the same but all are accessed via Windows. Click Start then Settings, and then 'Update and recovery', followed by Recovery. Now click 'Restart now' under 'Advanced startup', followed by Troubleshoot and then 'Advanced options'. Finally, click UEFI Firmware Settings, followed by Restart.

You can hear beeps but see no display

Hearing high-pitched beeps after your PC is switched on is the BIOS's way of telling you something's wrong. The problem could be anything from a dead battery (see the final fix) to a faulty processor. First, check your motherboard's manual, or the support pages of the manufacturer's website. There's also a comprehensive list of these 'beep codes' and their meanings at www.snipca.com/19460. It's a good idea to open up the PC to make sure all the components are firmly inserted and free from dust – then try booting again.

BIOS is corrupted

Sometimes the BIOS gets corrupted, resulting in a confusing boot message, beep code (see previous tip) or nothing at all. In these circumstances it might be possible to restore the BIOS by 'flashing' it. The process varies from one manufacturer to another so you'll need to visit the relevant support pages to check the precise method, but typically it involves using a second PC to copy downloaded BIOS files to a USB stick and then ensuring it's inserted into a specific USB port before switching on your faulty PC.

BIOS forgets time, date or other settings

When your PC's BIOS forgets the time, date or other settings, it's probably down to a faulty backup battery. This cell (type CR2032, see image) lives on the motherboard. Replacing the battery is easy: just open your PC, use a flat-headed tool to carefully prise out the dead cell and then pop in the replacement. Now access the BIOS and set the time and date. If other BIOS settings have been messed up, look for an option like 'Reset BIOS Defaults' or 'Load Failsafe Defaults'. Press Escape (Esc) to exit and save your changes.

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PGi550/CLi551XL Set of 5 £54.99
PGi550XL Black 22ml £11.99
CLi551XL Colours 11ml £10.99
PG540 Black 8ml £10.99
PG540XL Black 21ml £15.99
CL541 Colour 8ml £13.99
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3	sky	Sky: Broadband	£10.00 (FREE for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£0.00
4	EE	EE: Broadband & Calls	£9.95 (£1 for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited **	£12.00

Terms & Conditions apply - see ISP sites for details
*First-year cost does not include line rental. Cost is calculated at monthly price x12 with all introductory offers subtracted. Additional charges incurred outside of free inclusive calls not included in first-year cost.
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Jargon Buster

1080p Of the common types of high-definition video, this is the best quality: 1920x1080 pixels.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

802.11ac A standard for wireless networks that allows for higher transfer speeds than 802.11n.

Add-on See Extensions.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel displays. Most commonly used in smartphones, tablets and smartwatches.

Avatar A graphic or icon used to represent a computer user, either online or in a video game.

BIOS Basic Input-Output System. Essential software built into every PC that connects the vital components. It's visible for a few seconds when the PC starts.

Command line A way to control a computer by typing instructions one at a time. In Windows this is called the Command Prompt.

Crowdfunding A process where a company gets the financing to launch a new product from prospective customers online.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Eight-core A standard processor has one core, but most modern processors are dual-, quad- or even eight-core, making them faster.

Extension A program that adds extra features to your browser.

Gigabit Ethernet A very fast networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals. It is found on many new TVs, media PCs and HD products such as Blu-ray disc players and PlayStation consoles.

HTTPS HyperText Transport Protocol Secure. The protocol used to access a secure Web server. When https:// is used as the prefix of a web address rather than the common http://, the session is managed by a security protocol and the transmission is encrypted.

IP address Internet Protocol Address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IP67 An official industry rating classifying the level of protection in a product against outside intrusion. A rating of IP67 means that a device is protected against dust and against the effects of immersion in water between 15cm and 1m.

Micro USB A miniature version of USB, often found on smartphones, tablets and portable hard drives.

Mini HDMI Smaller version of the HDMI cable and connector to accommodate smaller devices.

.NET A software framework built by Microsoft that helps developers make programs for Windows.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Pictbridge Technology that allows digital cameras to print directly to a printer, without a computer.

2015 BACK ISSUE CD

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ISO file A type of image file that contains all the data from a CD or DVD disc.

Keyframe A location on a timeline which marks the beginning or end of a transition in video production.

LAN Local-area network. A computer network in one place, such as a home or office.

Megapixel A measure of the amount of detail that can be recorded by a digital image. A one-megapixel image is made up of a million dots (pixels).

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

PUP Potentially Unwanted Program. A program that may not be desired, despite the user consenting to it being downloaded. Examples include unnecessary plug-ins, toolbars and browser hijackers.

Push notifications Alerts from apps on phones and tablets that appear without you having to open the app.

RAM Random-access memory. The PC's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on. Its capacity is measured in megabytes: the more memory your PC has, the more things it can process simultaneously.

RAR Roshal Archive. A format for storing compressed files.

Registry The part of Windows that stores information on all hardware and software installed on your PC. The Registry can be edited to tweak settings but incorrect changes can damage the PC.

Root To perform tasks on Android devices that aren't permitted by the manufacturer.

RTF Rich Text Format. A file format used to transfer files between different types of word-processing programs. It preserves most of the formatting of a document.

SATA 3 Also known as SATA 600. The latest and fastest version of the SATA interface for connecting internal storage devices to a PC.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

SMTP Simple Mail Transfer Protocol. A standard for sending email messages. It is now largely reserved for sending messages rather than receiving them.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors, printers and the internet.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than conventional hard drives.

System restore point The collection of system files stored by System Restore on a given date and time to which Windows can revert if a problem occurs.

USB 2.0 Faster successor to USB that's used by devices such as external hard drives.

USB 3.0 An even faster version of the USB standard used to connect devices to a computer.

USB Type-C A new connector that's reversible, letting you plug it in upside down.

WLAN Wireless Local Area Network. A wireless computer network that links two or more devices in a limited area, such as a home.

All Windows 10 jargon explained in our Definitive Guide: www.snipca.com/17716

The Final Straw

KEN RIGSBY is *Computeractive*'s Mr Angry

This issue Ken Rigsby says three sneers for...

Broadband hype

Is your internet fast enough? I'll wager that your answer is a big, loud "NO!". Or, if you're of a more mild-mannered disposition: "Well, it's okay, but by golly I wouldn't mind a few extra megabytes per second!"

You're not alone. A recent report by an outfit called the British Infrastructure Group (BIG), and backed by over 100 MPs, is scathing about the state of the UK broadband market. And so they called their report 'Broadbad'. You can read all 72 pulsating pages at www.snipca.com/19533, but a potted version is that some 5.7m people in the UK don't receive the 10Mbps that industry regulator Ofcom considers essential for an "effective quality of service".

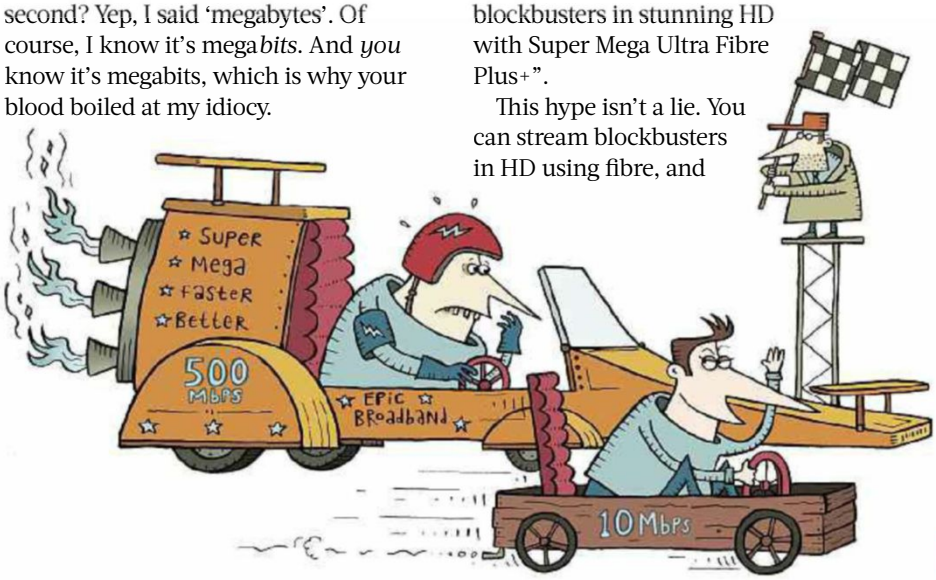
Meanwhile, internet service providers (ISPs) bend over backwards to persuade customers that faster is better. And that if you're not on the latest 500Mbps package then you're probably rubbish in bed. Or at the very least suffer rubbish streaming in bed. Hard to argue with, eh? I sure can't. Actually, of course I can. Arguing is my *raison d'être*. But first, let's clear up some confusion. You know earlier, when I said some of you probably wouldn't object to a few extra megabytes per second? Yep, I said 'megabytes'. Of course, I know it's mega*bits*. And *you* know it's megabits, which is why your blood boiled at my idiocy.

> Sneer at the Joneses for overpaying for broadband every month

Computeractive's sub-editors also know it's megabits, so their blood is boiling because they are going to have to go back and undo their correction to my earlier mistake, which wasn't actually a mistake (still with me?). I'm mischievous like that.

But the point is that many people don't know megabytes from megabits any more than they would notice the difference between standard-definition video and HD at 10 paces. This type of ignorance is a gift to the marketers because fear is a useful tool in advertising: "Don't miss out! Stream the latest Hollywood blockbusters in stunning HD with Super Mega Ultra Fibre Plus+".

This hype isn't a lie. You can stream blockbusters in HD using fibre, and your ISP will happily charge you the extra for a faster service. You're happy. Your ISP's happy. Everyone's happy!



So, just how fast is fast enough? 17Mbps with BT's standard broadband? Or 76Mbps with Infinity? Or Virgin's 200Mbps? All these boasts are prefixed with those weaselly marketing words 'up to', but it barely matters because by the time you read this column another ISP will have upped the ante again. That's the nature of hype: it's selling the fear of missing out. Keeping up with the Joneses.

Now consider this. What can you do with a slower connection? Say, 10Mbps. Surely anything less than 10Mbps is too slow to be useful, or why would Ofcom suggest it as a minimum for an effective quality of service? I'll tell you what you can do with 10Mbps broadband. You can stream a programme via BBC iPlayer in glorious high definition. And then fire up a second HD stream. And then a third. That's because the iPlayer's HD streams are pumped out at around 3.2Mbps, plus a tiny bit extra for audio. How many times do you need to watch three different HD streams simultaneously?

I'm not saying it never happens – households with Netflix-obsessed teenagers beware. But for many people, shelling out for ever-faster broadband is simply falling for the hype. You are paying for something you'll rarely use.

So, don't try to keep up with the Joneses. Instead, do that other quintessentially British thing: sneer at the Joneses. Sneer at their stupidity for overpaying every month. Sneer at their unshakeable belief that they must have the fastest-ever broadband. Sneer, sneer, sneer. And then sneer some more.

Unless, that is, you're one of the Joneses. In which case, I'm sorry about all of the above – it was an intentional mistake. I'm mischievous like that.

Do you agree with Ken? Let us know at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue Ken sees no future in outlandish tech predictions

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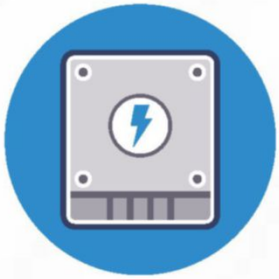

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